

LITTLE MISS
MELODY
MARIAN KEITH



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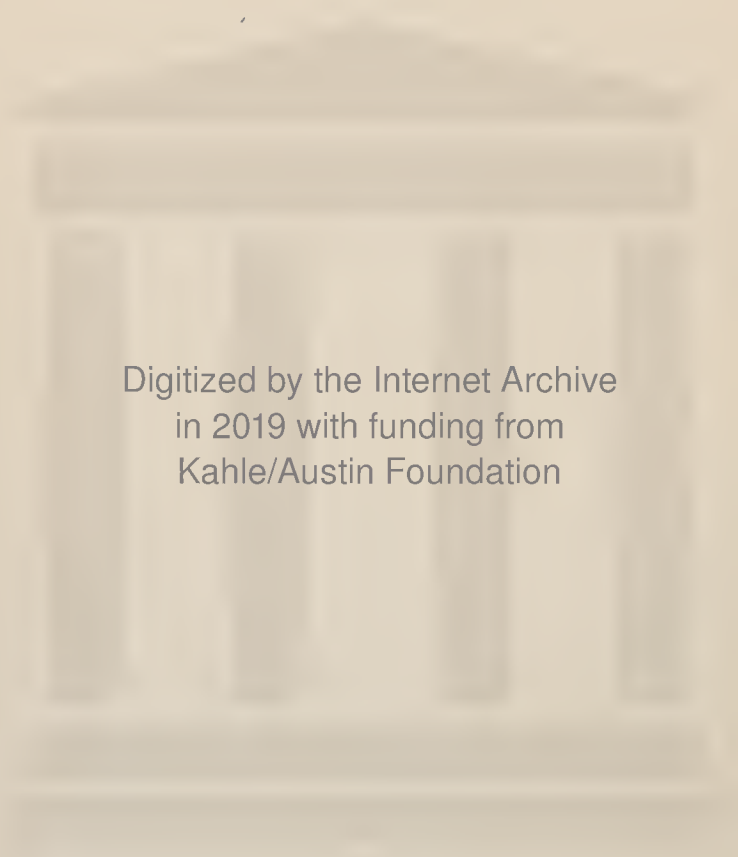


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LITTLE MISS MELODY

MARIAN KEITH



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LITTLE MISS MELODY

BY

MARIAN KEITH

AUTHOR OF "IN ORCHARD GLEN," "THE SILVER MAPLE,"
"TREASURE VALLEY," ETC.

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LITTLE MISS MELODY

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CHAPTER I

“AND SEW A FINE SEAM”

THE village that stood on Cherry Hill was half a mile in length and some twenty rods wide. It consisted of a single street, stretching in a straight, white, tree-shaded line, from the Presbyterian Church on the West to the old Bradley Hotel, which marked the extreme East End. It was quite the prettiest village in Ontario; a little garden community set in the centre of a wide garden valley. An ambitious and progressive spirit in the inhabitants had added much to nature's gifts. If you lived in Cherry Hill, and your neighbour bought a new pump or an up-to-date lightning-rod for his barn, or a fashionable style of wire fencing for his lot, then it became necessary that you get a larger and redder pump, several newer lightning-rods, and a more ornamental fencing for your frontage. So when old Wellington Caldwell, who used to be gardener to a Duke or something of that sort in the Old Country, planted mountain ash trees along the front of his lot, and laid out a smooth lawn, and trained climbing roses all over his veranda, and took to raising an acre or so of flowers—immediately all Cherry Hill burst out into a glory of mountain ash trees, lawns, climbing roses and flower gardens.

Every family in the village, except the Kellys, who had too many children, and the Murphys, who had too many pigs, lived in a riot of flowers from the first crocus of April to the

last aster of October. And in fact the only kind of blossoms you were not likely to see during summer's gay rotation, was cherry blossoms, for there were no cherry trees on Cherry Hill.

On this warm September morning the white dusty line of the village street, between its drooping fringes of mountain ash, lay asleep in the sunshine. The far-off shouts of the Kelly children, hieing forth on their Saturday expedition, the rhythmic bell of Archie McDuff's anvil, and a slight difference of opinion between Mrs. Murphy's pig and the storekeeper's dog as to the privilege of the King's Highway were the only sounds that disturbed the Sabbath-like peace.

But there was one house in the village where there were life and stir and prodigious amount of work going on. Away at the west end of the street, where the village church lifted its slim grey tower above the tree tops, stood the Manse. It was an old, grey, brick house with green shutters and a sagging veranda; and like all the other houses it was surrounded by a wide, green lawn and a gay, flower garden.

On the veranda, under the heavy Virginia creepers, sat the busiest person in the village;—a very small girl, straining every nerve to accomplish the hemming of a very large towel.

To say that Janet Meldrum sat is scarcely correct; except as a robin may be said to sit on a twig, on a warm April morning when the rain has just ceased.

Her shining eyes, her restless little brown hands, her small thin body, even the long, heavy braid of brown hair, that hung almost to the hem of her pink gingham dress, were all alive and eager and in constant motion.

Beside her low chair lay a little fox-terrier, dividing his time between taking very short naps and watching his mistress to see what fun was coming next.

Janet had been sent to the veranda, and commanded to finish this towel, which had stretched its serpent trail over many a Paradise of a Saturday morning; and this was the manner of her sewing:—

She took one laborious stitch, emitting a tremendous sigh, jerked her thread through and tangled it. Then she suddenly became aware that she had no thimble, and made a leap for her mother's work basket, that lay on the table near. The leap was longer than necessary and landed her on top of the basket. Its contents of spools, needles, pins, bodkins and a hundred other small articles went spinning over the sloping veranda floor, and all hurried outward towards the tangle of shrubs beneath. Janet dropped her towel and made a dismayed leap after the runaways. The little fox-terrier woke up, and gaily joined the chase, under the mistaken notion that it was a new kind of game his little comrade had invented for his amusement. In the midst of a great deal of noise and running and laughter there came a pained and reproving voice from the open window.

“Janet, child; what *can* you be doing?”

Janet snatched a spool from the little dog's jaws. “Pepper! You bad boy! It's the things from your basket, Mother dear, they won't stay still. But I've got them all back again; every one of them jumped out!” She threw the last truant thimble back into its home; and sank into her chair again. The little dog came and stood before her, his tongue, his tail, and his bright eager eyes all coaxing for more fun.

Janet took her second stitch, with a reproving air. “Now, Pepper, don't you see I've got this towel to hem?” she asked in a prim voice which was an exact, if unconscious, imitation of the one inside the window.

This time the thimble was in place but being one of her mother's it was much too big and caused the next diversion. It slipped off, and Janet jabbed the needle into her finger. She dropped the towel and leaped to her feet.

“Oh, Mother!” she called, trying hard not to look pleased. “My finger's going to bleed in a minute, something awful. May I get a rag to put on it?”

“That's the result of your jumping about so, Janet,” replied the pained voice. “Why can't you sit quietly when you sew? Run upstairs and you will find a piece of old

linen in the right hand corner of the second drawer, and leave Pepper——”

But Janet was half way up the stairs long before the directions had been finished, the little dog leaping ahead. She had not heard where her mother told her to look for the old linen; so there was a great deal of rumaging and running from one room to another. At last a bandage was found and adjusted. When this elaborate piece of work was done, and Janet and her frisky companion had danced back to the veranda, the pricked finger was as large as the whole hand and considerably in the way. This necessitated a new bandage of more moderate proportions. But still no thimble would go on a finger that was almost as big as a fist. So it became necessary to sew without a thimble; and Janet was ready for the third stitch on her towel.

Just then the wire door leading into the hall swung open, and Janet's mother came out. She moved slowly, absorbed in reading a paper which she had spent the morning writing. Mrs. Meldrum was a tall handsome woman of commanding appearance. Moreover, she was the most capable woman in all the wide reaches of Cherry Valley. She could write a paper on any subject, and read it with equal excellence; she was a good housekeeper, displaying a supernatural ability in managing domestic finances which made it possible for her family to live in comfort on a country minister's salary; she was a perfect general as an organiser; was the leader in the many activities of the Church and community; and was a better public speaker than her husband.

And yet, notwithstanding all this excellence and efficiency, Mrs. Meldrum was always in a state of bewildered helplessness before the problem of her restless, busy, frolicsome little girl. Janet was not the sort of thing one could catalogue or pigeon-hole. The Meldrums had married late in life, and their little daughter was more like a beloved grandchild than their own; and was a constant source of joy and alarm and startling surprises.

Her mother came out with a vague idea that she ought to keep Janet still, but her mind was on the paper which she

was to read on “Home Ideas and Ideals” at the next meeting of the Women’s Institute. She sat down, unseeing, in her rocking-chair; and Janet made a dab at her fourth stitch; but stopped in the middle of it as her mother folded her paper.

“Mother, shall I run to the gate and see if they are coming?”

“Janet,” her mother was picking her own sewing out of a very untidy basket, “why can you not sit at your hemming for a few minutes? Just see the state you have left my basket in, child!”

“But, Mother, they might be coming up the hill right now; and I ought to open the gate.”

“You’ve been to the gate half-a-dozen times this morning already; and you know very well Daddy can’t get home till after dinner. Mr. Balfour’s train won’t be in until one o’clock. Besides, you would be sure to hear the car long before you could see it. Do try to sit still like a good girl.”

Janet struggled with her thread in silence for the space of five seconds.

“Mother, what do you think he’ll look like?” she asked.

“Who?” asked her mother absorbed in fitting a triangular patch upon an octagonal rent in Janet’s school dress.

“Why, Mr. Balfour,” Janet wondered how her mother could be thinking of anything else. “He’ll have to be our father when Daddy’s away, won’t he?”

Her mother laughed. It was always a source of wonder to Janet why her mother and father so often laughed at her most serious remarks; but as laughter was always easy and pleasant, she laughed too.

“I’m afraid not. He’s very young, not through College yet; and he’ll be more like a big brother. But you must remember, Janet, when he is here you mustn’t run in and out of the study as you do with Father. You must keep away from him, and not be too noisy; and you must not ask him questions about anything whatever.”

Janet sighed a loud, windy sigh that was almost a groan. This strange man, who was to take Daddy’s pulpit and his

study and all his work in the next few montns, while poor Daddy was away trying to get his health back, promised to make even breathing very difficult. She had had so many rules laid down regarding her conduct towards him that life was going to be too complicated to live.

She took another stitch and her thread became tangled again,—a very dreadful tangle; but right in the midst of it came a sound that turned her rigid. She sat perfectly still, her ears strained;—yes, there it was—Bud's yell! It came from behind the church. The Kellys were back and had started their ball game!

Janet loved the noisy, untidy Kelly family with all her heart and all her mind and all her strength; and she loved her neighbour, Bud Kelly, as herself. She was possessed of a longing that was a positive pain to dash back through the orchard and over the fence and pitch herself into that game.

She looked up with despairing eyes, but her mother forestalled her pleading.

"There are those noisy, idle children," she declared. "It is really shocking to think that Mrs. Kelly does not keep them at home. Molly and Rosie ought to be learning to sew."

Janet knew this was a sermon for her. She heaved another sigh, a loud, despairing expulsion of breath; and drew her thread through the fourth stitch with a jerk.

"Would it be very bad if I never learned to sew, Mother?" she asked, rocking violently in her little chair. "I think I'll be 'most near a hundred years old before I get this towel hemmed; and then there won't be time for anything else. I'll be older than Mrs. Gibbie Gibson."

"You need patience, Janet. Of course all little girls must learn to sew."

"Well, Miss Mitchell can't sew, and she's a school-teacher; and she told Marjorie Gillespie she couldn't learn if she lived as old as Methuselah. Miss Lena told us about him in Sunday School last Sunday. Mother, didn't everybody live awfully old in those days? Why, you must have had so

many grandmas and grandpas you'd never be able to visit them all. I'm glad I didn't live then if I'd have to hem a towel every Saturday," she added mournfully.

"I can't understand why you don't like hemming, Janet," said her mother, regarding her with puzzled eyes. "I had to learn to sew when I was a little girl; and yet Grandpa Fraser was well off and gave us all many advantages. When your Auntie Flora and Auntie Jean and I were little girls——"

Janet stopped rocking and listened in humble patience to the oft heard recital of the perfect deeds Mother and Aunt Flora and Aunt Jean had performed in their youth.

"I wish Grandpa Fraser hadn't gone and got poor," declared Janet practically. "But I suppose I'd have had to sew anyhow," she added with another sigh.

She leaned back and began rocking again to drown the joyous sounds from the back pasture field. Janet was of an argumentative turn and did not readily give up her side of the question.

"I don't see why I'll need to sew, Mother; if I'm going to be a singer," she suggested.

Her mother looked up from her sewing, a twinkle of amusement in her fine eyes.

"So you've decided to be a singer, have you?"

"Yes, Nellie's uncle says she's got a lovely voice, and she must be a singer some day. And we both always said we'd be the same thing. So I'm going to be a singer, too. I'm going to be a great singer and make a lot of money. Miss Lena says that her cousin Sylvia gets heaps of money for singing. And she can't sew—I know, 'cause Miss Sarah Kennedy was making her a dress yesterday, and she said to Mrs. Murphy, I heard her, 'Sylvia Ward wouldn't have a rag to her back if it wasn't for me!'"

"Well, well, dear," her mother said vaguely, not having heard half the chatter.

"I suppose it's awfully wicked to wish you were rich, like you used to be, Mother," said Janet, gazing dreamily

down the dazzling rows of gladioli that bordered the little path to the gate, "but if we were rich we could go to California with Father, couldn't we? But old Mr. Gibbie Gibson said at prayer-meeting that money was awfully bad for young people. What'll he do with all the money he has, Mother? Won't he give any of it to Jimmie and the children for fear it'll hurt them?"

Her mother smiled. There was no doubt that old Gibbie Gibson meant other people's children when he spoke of the evil effects of money. But she did not voice her thoughts. She had already learned that discretion was the only safe part of daily conduct. Her little girl had an uncanny memory and an embarrassing truthfulness that was often in danger of bringing discredit upon the minister's household.

"If I could make a lot of money singing," declared Janet, poking her needle into her stocking, "I'd buy stacks and stacks of things. I'd buy Mrs. Kelly a new shawl; and I'd buy Bud a cabinet for his bugs; and I'd buy two tickets to take us both to California with Daddy; and I'd buy a new collar for Pepper; and a ribbon, a pink satin one, for Blackie; and I'd buy a new Bible for Kirsty; and a new piano for Miss Lena; and I'd buy a plain gold ring for Martha Beckett. Miss Mitchell told Marjorie, and Nellie heard her, and Nellie told me, that Martha Beckett wanted a plain gold ring worse than anything else in the world, and I'd buy her a great big one,—I'd buy her two," she added generously.

It was impossible to put off the next stitch any longer, but just as Janet was about to take it, there came a pleasant interruption. Over in the lilac bush at the end of the veranda a little grey song sparrow seated himself upon a twig, and with his wee head on one side and his bright eye on Janet, he called to her:

"Chip, chip, chip, chip, chip, che-e-e-e-e!"

Can't you sit and sew?

Sew a straighter seam-some-soon!"

Janet jumped out of her chair with a little squeal of delight.

“Oh, Mother, did you hear what he’s saying?” She burst into a delighted peal of laughter, and the little singer shot to the other end of the garden. “Wasn’t he a dear darling? Did you hear what he said?”

Her mother glanced at her with indulgent, smiling eyes, but eyes that did not comprehend.

“No, dear, I didn’t hear; what did he say?”

Janet sang over the little ditty. “Wasn’t he cute? Isn’t that just what he said?”

“I suppose it is like it, but you haven’t imitated his little tune very well. I wish your ear were truer, Janet.”

“Bud must have true ears, because he knows every word all the birds say. He tells me all their songs. Oh, listen! There he goes again! He’s over in Caldwell’s grove!”

She tip-toed to the end of the veranda.

“Oh, Mother!” she whispered. “There’s a humming-bird! Look! Over there above the cosmos!”

Her mother looked up, just awakened to the fact that Janet was not at her task.

“Janet!” she called in a voice a little sterner. “There is your work thrown upon the floor, and you are idling. Remember what the little bird said.”

Janet came slowly back and again took up the dreadful burden of her sewing.

“I guess he never hemmed a towel or he wouldn’t talk like that,” she declared rather resentfully. “Oh, Mother, don’t you think towels you buy in the store are ever so much nicer. They’re already hemmed.”

Her thoughts still occupied with the “Ideals of Home,” Mrs. Meldrum was giving little heed. She had learned long ago that if she gave her attention to all Janet said and did she would have time for nothing else.

Janet jabbed in her needle for her sixth stitch, and with it her morning’s sewing came to a welcome end.

Across the street the gate of the Caldwell’s beautiful garden opened and a boy, a little bigger than Janet, emerged

sedately. He wore a very clean collar, his blue suit was brushed, his hair was smooth and he stepped across the street carefully so that no dust should obscure the lustre of his boots.

Janet gave a leap from her seat, waving the towel in the air.

"Hello, Len!" she cried. "There's Lennie, Mother! There's Lennie! It's time for practice. May I go now? Hello, Lennie! I'm coming!" and she dashed indoors for her hat.

CHAPTER II

GOES A-SINGING

JANET could never understand why she was always compelled to take a hat wherever she went; for it was always hanging down her back by its elastic, or blowing away over the fields. But the placing of it upon her head before she left home was a ceremony upon which her mother insisted, and had to be performed.

But Janet's hat was always astray. She made a frantic survey of the big bare parlour; under the old square piano behind the faded upholstered sofa. Pepper also circled rapidly around the room but neither of them discovered the truant. Neither was it in the big bare dining-room through which they dashed. It must have been left in the kitchen. Janet cautiously approached the door leading thereto. This was Kirsty's domain and not to be intruded upon lightly.

Kirsty McLeod had been a member of the household longer than Janet had, and the little daughter of the Manse had a profound respect for her. Every Saturday morning she put the kitchen through a special pre-Sabbath cleaning, and in view of the advent of the new minister Kirsty had scrubbed and rubbed and scoured to-day until the place fairly glittered. The stove had taken on such a high polish that the shining tea-kettle was reflected in its surface as in a pool of water. The glass doors of the high old cupboard and the plates and cups behind them shone in the morning sunlight. The crisp white curtains swayed gently in the breeze. The floor was as white as the ceiling and the walls were as clean as the floor.

And in the midst of this perfection a tall angular woman in a dark blue apron, her grey hair pulled straight back in

a tight little knot from her thin wrinkled face, stood at the white oil-cloth covered table preparing dinner.

Janet's bright eyes, peeping through a very narrow opening in the door, took this all in apprehensively. Kirsty had to be approached; it was never safe to burst into the kitchen as one would into Father's study.

"Please, Kirsty," she asked through the narrow crack, "is my hat here?"

Kirsty turned. "Keep yon pup out," she commanded, spying Pepper's black nose between Janet's feet. "An' watch where ye step, if ye must come in!"

Janet slammed the door in Pepper's face, leaving him whining indignantly in the hall. She took a leaping stride to the rag mat in front of the table.

"Lennie's waiting for me to go to practice, and I can't find my hat," she declared, hopping up and down on one foot as was her habit when she was in a hurry. "Do you know what I did with it, Kirsty?"

"What-like kind o' way is that ye've got yer hair?" demanded Kirsty. "Come here! Ye're no goin' out o' the house that fashion. Ye look like a tinker's bairn, instead o' the minister's!"

To Janet's dismay Kirsty took down a comb and brush from a little shelf beneath the kitchen mirror, and proceeded to undo the little girl's long heavy braid. She submitted to the dreadful ordeal as a wild creature does to the trap that has caught it. She had made a great mistake in coming to the kitchen. She might have known Kirsty would comb her hair.

But there was no use arguing the matter; and she stood first on one foot and then on the other sighing furiously.

"I wonder what Mr. Balfour will be like, Kirsty," she said, in a desperate attempt to lighten the heavy moments with conversation. "Mother says he has nice brown eyes."

"It matters little what kinda eyes he has," remarked Kirsty, "as long's he has the root o' the matter in him. The Lord looketh not upon the outward man. Stand still!"

Janet was always impressed when Kirsty quoted Scrip-

ture, which was quite often, for Kirsty knew her Bible. She knew when a sermon was all it ought to be, too; and woe betide the preacher who delivered anything but the plain gospel in Knox pulpit. Kirsty would catch him, no matter how he might have the downward path concealed in flowers of rhetoric.

"Oh, Kirsty," cried Janet suddenly, forgetting her hair. "What will become of us all when Father goes away?"

Kirsty shook her head dolefully.

"The Lord preserve us," she said. "We'll be havin' sic a like time as niver was, with all the lasses runnin' after the young minister. Mark my words, things'll go jist tapsal-teerie!"

Janet listened in alarm. "Running after him, Kirsty? Why? Will he be running away?"

Kirsty gave a queer smile that went over to one side of her face and vanished quickly in wrinkles.

"Stand still," she commanded again, "I can't comb yer hair when ye're dancin' an' cuttin' capers."

Janet wondered about Mr. Balfour. Perhaps he was a great runner like Pat Murphy and took prizes. Daddy said he was a wonderful football player.

"Will he be running races, Kirsty?" she asked, but Kirsty did not trouble to answer. The longed for end of the ordeal had come. Her hair was combed. "Yer hat's hangin' in the back hall," Kirsty informed her. "Now run away, and don't be jumpin' an' kickin' up yer heels, but act like a wise bairn."

Janet left Kirsty's hands as the arrow leaves the bent bow. She tore her hat from its nail, and dashed out to the veranda. Lennie was waiting impatiently at the gate.

"Hurry up, Jenny," he wailed, "they've started!"

But Janet had one more ordeal to pass through before she was free. She had to parade for inspection before her mother's eye.

"But, Janet! You surely don't think you're ready?" cried her mother, as a flurry of pink gingham whirled round on one toe in front of her. "Just look at your dress!"

Janet stopped short and looked enquiringly at the faded gingham.

"Why, Mother? Won't it do?" she asked in dismay.

"Certainly it won't do for choir practice. I want you to put on your school serge; it's mended."

"But, Mother, I'll have to take care of it! I can't have a good time when I wear my school dress on Saturdays. I have to be thinking about Monday all the time."

"Well, I'm sure that will be an advantage if it will keep you from running about as you do, Janet."

"Please, Mother dear. It just makes me feel stiff all over when I get on a Monday dress on Saturday!"

"But this is so faded, child. I can't understand why you don't like pretty clothes. Think how nice Nellie will look. She won't be in her morning dress."

"But Nellie likes dress-up things. And I like old things, and we just have a lovely time if we wear what we like. Please, Mother!"

"Really, I don't understand you, Janet," sighed her mother.

Janet suddenly drooped. She did not like to hear her mother sigh. She turned away with a despairing glance towards the little boy at the gate.

"Very well, I'll go and put it on," she said in such a dreary, hopeless tone that her mother relented.

"Oh, well, never mind! If it's going to make you feel like that. Run away, then, like a good child and don't torment me any more!"

Janet kissed her mother rapturously and went leaping down the steps, Pepper, far ahead, barking with joy; for Pepper always went to the Saturday practice and considered himself as much a member of the choir as Janet.

"I've been waiting for you hours and hours," complained her cavalier. "I wish Mother wouldn't make me call for you, Janet."

"I wish she wouldn't, too," declared Janet agreeably. "Come on, run! They've started to sing!"

The sound of music was proceeding from the basement

of Knox Church, and Janet flew across the church lawn and up the walk, her hat hanging down her back, her attendant, who had waited for her so long, complaining far in the rear.

Janet played a great deal with Leonard Caldwell, because he lived just across the street and was very convenient, and because her mother wanted her to play with him. Lennie was a well-behaved, nice, tidy little boy, and Mrs. Meldrum found him infinitely preferable to the Kelly children as a companion for her little daughter. Janet liked Lennie, because she liked everybody, but she never sought his company unless there was no hope of Bud's; for some strange reason Janet's conviction was: better fifty minutes of Bud Kelly than a cycle of Lennie Caldwell.

They ran down the stairway leading to the basement, pushed open the door and were met by a blast of music.

Three rows of vocalists stretched across the long platform, and facing them, book and baton in hand, stood the young lady whom, above all others, Janet admired and loved. Miss Lena Sinclair was her Sunday School teacher, and in her pupil's opinion, quite the loveliest and best teacher in the whole world of Sunday schools.

At the little organ sat another young lady, and two or three more moved about among the lines of musicians, jerking an unruly chorister into good behaviour, or encouraging a backward one.

In the front row stood the younger children of the school, toes turned artlessly inward, most of them bare, too, for the summer was still warm in the Valley and many of the little toes of Cherry Hill did not go into winter hiding until the snow fell. They stood with their little round faces upturned to their leader, like a row of robins on a cherry limb, and shouted joyfully the first stanza of the opening chorus:

"We are scholars in the Sabbath School
Met in an-ni-ver-sa-ree,
We are here to entertain you now
And we hope you'll pleas-ed be!

We'll recite and sing you songs of joy,
And some dialogues you'll view ;
We welcome you, indeed we do,
To our An-ni-ver-sa-ree!"

The song had been written especially for the occasion by Jimmie Gibson's Allen, who was something of a poet. It was set to a jolly popular air, and when the juvenile choir raised it upon their robust young voices the low ceiling of the basement fairly quivered.

Janet slipped breathlessly into her place, and just taking time to smile on Bud, who was already there, she burst into the refrain:

"We welcome you,
Indeed we do,
To our An-ni-ver-sa-ree!"

Janet's place was at the larger end of the front row. She was old enough to be placed in the second, but she was small for her ten years. Beside, she loved the front row in all performances, and was so eager to be in it that an indulgent teacher found it impossible to put her back. It was not that Janet wanted to be seen; she was at all times utterly unconscious of Janet Meldrum. It was merely that she was so intensely interested in everyone and everything about her; and the front row was the best place to see and hear.

She loved to sing, too, as she loved everything that had to do with noise and motion; she was standing, now, half-a-foot in advance of her fellows, shouting at the top of her lung power. And even the long braid of brown hair, that hung almost to the hem of her pink gingham frock, fairly quivered with enjoyment.

At the end of the second chorus, Miss Lena Sinclair paused, baton suspended, and looked with a pained expression towards the larger end of the smallest row. Then Martha Beckett, who had been forcing the overworked little organ to keep pace with the galloping chorus, got up from her tread-mill and crossed over to the leader. They whis-

pered together for a few minutes, and then looked towards Janet, glancing away again quickly, when they caught her big grey eyes shining eagerly upon them.

The chorus stopped shoving and whispering and strained its small ears to listen. But all they gained was, first the cryptic message from Miss Sinclair: "I don't like to," in a very feeble tone; and from Martha Beckett, in a very forcible one, "Well, it's got to be done, and you're the one that ought to do it! It's awful."

Whatever it was that ought to be done, and was awful, was evidently not to be done just then, for a further whispered argument ended in the conclusion from the leader: "After a while: wait till next practice," and Martha Beckett tossed her head and said something about "partiality" and flounced back to the little organ, fairly making it squeal for mercy as the choir once more burst into the chorus:

"We are scholars in the Sabbath School
Met in An-ni-ver-sa-ree!"

When the practice was over and the choristers had gone storming down the flower-lined village street, Janet waited behind to gather up the hymn books for her beloved Miss Sinclair, and Nellie Gillespie waited because Janet did, as was her habit.

The teachers were down by the door giving their last admonitions regarding the next practice to the rapidly diminishing crowd. The room was becoming empty and quiet. As she gathered up the books, Janet was singing softly the words of the last hymn:

"Looking upward every day,
Sunshine on our faces,
Journeying nearer day by day
Toward the heavenly places."

Her child's soul was thrilled by its half-guessed meaning, and she sang joyously, spontaneously, as the birds or the angels sing.

"Jenny," said her little curly-headed chum, pausing with a pile of tattered books held in her small brown hands, "What makes you sing that way? You always sing so queer."

"How do I sing?" asked Janet, not in the least annoyed, but only very much interested. "I sing just the same as you do, don't I?"

"No, you don't. You sing awful queer. Rosie Kelly says you were singin' alto all the time to-day."

Janet was still more interested. This was really very flattering. Miss Lena Sinclair sang alto in the choir on Sundays; and how delightful to think she was like her. Perhaps she would sit beside her in the big choir one day, and they would sing off the same book!

"Was I?" she cried greatly pleased. "Why, that's just like Miss Lena, isn't it?"

Nellie was puzzled. She had a sensitive musical ear, and knew there was something wrong with Janet's conclusion.

"No, I don't think it's the same," she argued. "You always know when you're singing alto. You have to do it on purpose."

But Janet was not going to bother her head about such a small matter. Bud was waiting outside, and she caught up the last pile of books and ran up to the platform. The teachers had settled themselves around a table for a conference on the difficult matter of cutting down the programme to less than a four-hour performance.

"Now that's seven recitations," Miss Mitchell was saying, "and we simply can't have another one. I suppose the whole clan Gibson will be up in arms, though, if young Bella isn't allowed to show off."

Miss Mitchell was Janet's teacher in the public school. In Janet's vocabulary a teacher was an exalted person, made to be loved and adored. So of course Miss Mitchell must be exalted and adorable. But her halo was somewhat dimmed by a habit of impaling folk upon sharp remarks such as she had just uttered. Janet slipped around to the side where

Miss Lena sat, and put the books in a neat pile on her corner of the table.

"Here's Janet now, Lena," cried Martha Beckett, interrupting Miss Sinclair's gracious thanks. "You'd better tell her."

"Miss Sinclair thinks you'd better be in a dialogue, instead of the choir, Janet," she added.

Miss Lena coughed and looked confused.

"I'm getting up a lovely dialogue, Janet, with five little girls in it," said Miss Mitchell, coming to her friend's aid. "Wouldn't you rather be in that than in the choir?"

The little girl's eyes shone. "Oh, Miss Mitchell! I'd just *love* to be in both! Could I?"

Martha Beckett giggled, Miss Mitchell smiled, and Miss Lena looked distressed.

"Maybe you could sing a solo, too," suggested Martha Beckett.

Janet clasped her small brown hands.

"Oh, oh, could I?" she gasped. "I'd love that more'n anything. I'm going to be a singer some day like Sylvia Ward and it would be a start! I—I can sing 'The Holy City,' " she suggested.

Martha Beckett and Miss Mitchell burst out laughing, and even Miss Lena smiled. Janet did not know why, but she laughed with them. And she did not understand either, why Miss Lena drew her close, suddenly, and kissed her.

"Wouldn't you like to stand in the second row, beside Nellie, dear?" she asked, with an apologetic glance towards her assistants.

Janet Meldrum always spoke out the truth, frankly and uncompromisingly; so, as she did not at all want to leave the front row, even to stand beside Nellie, she said so.

"No, thank you, Miss Lena. I'd far rather stand in front, if you don't mind. I can see everything so much better there."

Martha Beckett giggled again, and Janet giggled with her; but Miss Lena still looked worried.

"Well, we'll see about it, dearie," she said hurriedly, "I

think you'd better stand beside Nellie at the next practice, though, just to see how nice it is."

"Has the new preacher come yet, Janet?" asked Martha Beckett, standing up to fix her beflowered hat and her puffed hair before a little mirror she had propped up on the organ.

Janet watched her, absorbed. "Not yet; Father's gone to Algonquin for him. But Kirsty says she's afraid he'll run away."

"Run away?" asked all the young ladies, now very much interested, and Martha Beckett, her mouth full of pins, turned and exclaimed: "Sakes alive; who with?"

"I don't know," said Janet, "but Kirsty says that all the lassies will be running after him and——"

There was a scream of laughter in which Janet joined. She loved to hear people laugh and enjoy themselves, and always laughed with them for sheer joy.

"What else did she say, Janet?" asked Martha Beckett eagerly. But Lena Sinclair put a stop to the fun.

"You and Nellie had better run away home now, darlings," she said. "We have some more work to do. Come early next Saturday. Bye-bye!"

Janet and Nellie danced away down the narrow cement walk, their arms around each other. Lennie had gone home long ago, for he was never allowed to play on the street with the rough village children. Bud was out in the middle of the road with a crowd of boys, playing "hop-step-and-jump." As the little girls paused to watch, his brilliant red head and small thin body went up into the air in a long leap that took him far beyond the tracks of the latest competitor.

Janet was unable to suppress a shout of triumph; she turned away regretfully. Like Lennie she was never allowed to play out on the street, and mother would be watching for her return.

"Miss Lena said I was to stand beside you at next practice, Nell," she said in parting. "I'd rather stand in the front line at the concert where I can see Mother and every-

body better ; but I guess Miss Lena thinks I'm too big and it'll be lovely beside you," she added, putting her arm around Nellie again.

Nellie returned the embrace warmly.

"Oh, won't that be dandy ! But you won't sing loud, will you, Jenny, when you stand beside me ? 'Cause when you do, you always put me off the tune."

CHAPTER III

MEETS A NEW FRIEND

ALL afternoon, as Janet played alone in the orchard, her busy thoughts returned again and again to Nellie's warning. She wondered how it was that Nellie could be so easily put off a tune. She herself had never had such an experience. And yet she was always being warned against derailing other singers.

Father was always saying, when they sang around the piano in the evenings, "Softly, daughter, don't sing so loud. You'll put us all off the tune."

And often in church, when Janet's soul was lifted up on the wings of the morning psalm, and her voice followed, her mother would whisper:

"Hush, Janet, don't sing that way. You'll put everyone off the tune."

Mother was expecting the Ladies' Aid this afternoon. They were to meet for sewing and a cup of tea afterwards, and Janet had been cautioned to play in the orchard behind the house, while they were arriving. This was a very painful restriction. She could not even swing on the gate and watch for Daddy and the new minister; and then Bud might pass any minute and she would miss him.

The orchard was a very delightful place, however; its boughs laden with crimson and golden apples. Away down at the farther end was Janet's chicken yard, where the hens scratched and sang merrily in the sunshine. But Janet was alone in her paradise and could not enjoy it. Of course, there was always Leola, and for a while she amused herself chasing her around the orchard trees with Pepper's valuable assistance. Leola was Janet's twin sister, whom

nobody but Janet knew. She was her invisible comrade who, when Bud Kelly or other less favoured companions failed, was summoned out of the shadows to help Janet run and jump and climb trees.

Janet grew tired of her at last, and wandered towards the house, seeking new amusement. That was one convenient thing about Leola, she could be dismissed at a moment's notice, and you didn't have to trouble to put her away or bring her in out of the rain. Blackie, her pet cat, was sleeping as usual in the sunshine on the back porch. He arose to meet Janet in his dignified manner, stretching himself lazily. But just then Pepper came bounding up; and, with an air of disgust, Blackie turned away and curled up in the sunshine again. Janet stooped to fondle the big black pussy, and slowly entered the back hall, taking care to avoid the kitchen, lest Kirsty capture her and comb her hair again.

The parlour door stood ajar, and from it came a murmur of voices, and a pleasant clatter of tea cups. Janet stopped in dismay; she had forgotten the Ladies' Aid. She was suddenly aware of the dust on her shoes, of water splashed down the front of her dress, of the fact that her long braid had lost its confining ribbon. And where in the world was it gone? And how was it she had not noticed before that one stocking was hanging down below her boot top? She tip-toed cautiously past the parlour door, and as cautiously slipped up the stairs. She knew she dared not walk into a Ladies' Aid meeting in this plight. Janet would not have minded in the least, herself; but her mother had impressed the fact upon her that, when meetings were being held in the parlour, she was to arrange her hair and wash her hands and face before appearing.

She mounted the stairs heavily. This endless washing of hands and combing of hair was a great burden. She wondered why girls could not have their hair cut off the same as boys had, and why all people didn't live like the Kellys, who were never bothered about soap and water.

She glanced in at the neat white bed and crisp curtains

of the guest room. It was in immaculate order, ready for the new minister. There was one crimson, velvet-like dahlia in a tall vase on the dresser; the floral offering Mother always made to a guest. Janet went on to her own little room, where she made some half-hearted attempts to repair the ravages of her play. She washed her hands, made up her mind that her face was clean enough, and that it was impossible to do anything with her hair, and having repaired the breach between her suspender and her stocking, decided she was ready to go downstairs. There was an iced cake to be passed around, and already the odour of Kirsty's tea was wafted up the stairs.

But as she passed her mother's room she stopped. The bed was laid out in a tempting array of hats and bonnets and light wraps. Janet wondered if it would be very wicked to try them on. There was Nellie's mother's hat, a beautiful black straw trimmed with purple flowers. But both she and Nellie had tried it on many times before, so it did not present any unexplored territory. But there was young Mrs. Gibbie Gibson's hat. She had been married only about a month, and her bridal array was still astonishing the village. Janet took up the beautiful creation of white tulle and pink roses, and placed it aslant on the top of her tousled head. But it drooped so far over her face that she could not see herself in the glass. Then she tried on Susie Beckett's mother's bonnet, and Miss Lena's mother's hat, and Lennie's mother's toque, and several others, all of which she could identify.

But, like Goldilocks, who had to try each bear's bed before she found her choice, Janet at last discovered a head-dress exactly to her taste. It was old Mrs. Gibbie Gibson's bonnet. She put it on carefully, tying the long silk ribbons under her chin. Then she picked up the old lady's plaid shawl and put it around her shoulder. Mrs. Gibson's "seein' specs" were folded in a clean handkerchief under the shawl. Janet put them on, too. She felt there was something lacking, so she went into her mother's closet and got out an old skirt. By tying it up under her arm-pits she

managed to walk in it. Then she looked in the glass and laughed with glee at her appearance.

And just then to make things complete, Pepper, who had been sniffing all over the house for her, came bounding in. Janet grabbed him up joyfully, and staggered off, in her clinging garments, to her own room. Here it was but the work of a minute to dress up the little dog as a baby. Pepper had often been subjected to such treatment before and was used to it now, but he did not submit without many grumblings and complainings; which Janet hushed and soothed as if he were a real baby. Then, clasping him in her arms, she trailed away down the hall to visit Leola in the study.

She was so engrossed that she did not hear a car stopping at the gate, nor the sound of the front door opening, nor her father's voice as he left his new assistant at the front door.

"Run right in, while I put away the car," it said. "If you don't see the lady of the Manse go right upstairs to the study. It's the first door to the right."

The new minister was not yet through college; he was very young, and rather afraid of women. When he opened the Manse door his startled ears were assailed by a clatter of cups and tongues issuing from an open door facing him. He turned and silently fled upstairs to the sanctuary of the minister's study. As he reached the top step he stopped in astonishment.

Coming to meet him was a very small old lady in a big black bonnet that enveloped her head like a hood, a trailing black dress, and an old fashioned plaid shawl. And in her arms she carried a squirming, complaining baby, with a pair of wicked, black eyes gleaming through its white veil.

Hugh Balfour had a heart that was very susceptible to certain influences. He loved all children; he was particularly partial to little girls; and when he met an old lady with a black bonnet and shawl, he was 'hers to do with as she pleased. So this queer combination of old woman and little girl was absolutely irresistible. He stopped, stared, and burst out laughing.

The old lady laughed, too, away back inside her bonnet; a very youthful, joyous laugh.

"Oh, my!" she exclaimed, "are you the new minister?"

"I think I must be."

"Oh, oh, I'm so glad!"

"Why?" he asked delighted at such a warm welcome.

"Because I was afraid when I heard you coming upstairs that you were old Mrs. Gibbie Gibson and I've got her bonnet and her shawl on. Did you think I was Mrs. Gibbie Gibson?"

"Well, I wasn't sure. You see I don't quite know who you are."

"Well, I'm really just Janet, inside me, but outside me I'm Miss Sylvia Ward, and I live in Algonquin, and this is my baby. Do you mind holding him for a minute till I take off this shawl? 'Cause maybe they'll be coming up soon, and I guess I've been pretty bad to dress up like this without asking."

The old lady was unconsciously dropping her rôle with her costume.

"I hope your baby's well, ma'am," he said politely, as he put down his suit-case and took the squirming bundle under his arm.

The rumblings beneath the shawl grew dangerously loud, and the gleam of teeth shone through the baby's veil.

"He's very fretful," answered the anxious old lady, catching her cue joyfully, "I'm afraid he's teething."

"I hope not," said the visitor. "I think he's got all the teeth he needs, by the look of those he's showing me."

The old lady giggled again. Janet always saw a joke ahead and ran to meet it. She was rapidly becoming transformed before the visitor's eyes. The bonnet was untied, the shawl unpinned, and a small person in a pink gingham frock was just appearing, when the murmur of voices below swelled out suddenly, a door was opened, there was a swiftly increasing rustle of skirts, and the Ladies' Aid was coming up the stairs!

Instantly the stately old lady became a terrified dancing Dervish.

"Oh, oh, oh! If Lennie's mother,—if Susie's mother,—if Nellie's mother sees me!" She was tearing madly at her hampering garments. Her new acquaintance came nobly to her aid.

"Run back to the room and take them off," he whispered, "and I'll go down and keep them talking till you're ready."

The old lady went leaping away along the hall, and the young man went slowly down the stairs, with something of the feeling of a small rear guard turning back from the retreat to charge the whole enemy's advancing host.

There was no difficulty in holding the Ladies' Aid. Here was the new minister. He was tall, and very young, and very good-looking. They all crowded around him while Mrs. Meldrum presented him proudly. It was quite the worst predicament that the young man had ever found himself in. Many of the Ladies' Aid were young ladies, too, which added not a little to his misery. He wished he had left the little imp to her fate upstairs.

He was so successful in holding back the flood, that a small figure in pink gingham appeared at the head of the stair before they were through with him. When he saw her at his side, flushed and star-eyed with the excitement of her escapade, he felt rewarded.

"Do you think I ought to tell Mrs. Gibbie Gibson that I wore her bonnet?" she whispered, as her mother at last went up with Mrs. Caldwell, who was always the most voluble and lingering guest.

"No, oh no," he cried, quite forgetting the ethics of the case, in the fear that he would be involved. "I don't think you need to at all."

She looked up at him with shining eyes. "Oh, Mr. Balfour," she cried ecstatically. "I think you're going to be an awfully nice minister. I hope you won't run away, will you?"

"Run away?" he asked puzzled.

"Yes, Kirsty said we'd have an awful time when Daddy

went away, because all the young lassies would be running after you."

Before the newcomer could reply to this astonishing statement, Mr. Meldrum came in from putting away his car; and Janet forgot everything in the rapture of his return. She flung herself upon him, clasping him round the knees, so that he stood laughing and helpless.

"Oh, Daddy, Daddy," she exclaimed, looking up at him with adoring eyes. "You're the loveliest Daddy in the whole world, and I love you—oh, I love every bit of you—I love even the buttons on your coat!"

CHAPTER IV

THE WATER BABY

FOR several years the minister of Cherry Hill had been failing in health. In his youth and early manhood he had done strenuous pioneer work in the West, and coming back to Ontario, when his youthful vigour began to fail, he had married and settled in Knox Church. But his health had been spent in the strain of his earlier days, and after a dozen years in the little Ontario village, he had received an imperative order from his physician to take at least a year's rest. His one brother, who lived in California, had sent for him, and all were in hopes that the winter in the warm climate might restore his health. He had secured the son of his oldest and dearest friend to fill his pulpit, and his wife and little daughter were to remain in the old home until he returned.

The separation, which was inevitable in the face of the expense, was a great trial to all three; but as yet little Janet was not greatly disturbed by it. It was in the future, and she did not trouble much over anything beyond the present moment. For a time her thoughts were occupied with the new member of the family.

"Don't you think Mr. Balfour is ever, ever, so nice, Mother?" she asked for the tenth time the next morning, as she helped her mother with the light household duties that were permitted in the Manse on the Sabbath.

Mrs. Meldrum's mind was on the lesson which she taught the Bible Class and her answer was vague.

"Yes, dear, I'm sure he is. His mother is a very lovely lady."

"And he sings lovely, doesn't he? I heard him sing that

hymn this morning in his bedroom, the hymn about—you know :

‘My God, I thank Thee, who hast made
This earth so bright.’”

Janet sang it at the top of her fresh, young voice.

“Hush, hush, Janet dear,” said her mother, carefully arranging a bunch of feathery cosmos on the dining-room table. “You’ll disturb Mr. Balfour at his sermon.”

Janet pondered for a moment. She was always being warned about her singing. It reminded her of the happenings of yesterday.

“Mother, do I sing different from other girls? Nellie says that I put her off the tune; and Rosie Kelly said I was singing alto yesterday. Miss Lena wants me to stand back beside Nellie, but Miss Mitchell wants me to be in a dialogue and not in the choir at all.”

Mrs. Meldum was giving Janet her undivided attention now. She had been rather a good singer in her younger days, and her little daughter’s lack of musical ability was a sore trial to her.

“Did Miss Lena say she would rather you did not sing in the choir?” she asked anxiously.

“Oh, no! She wants me to be in it, but I don’t want to put Nellie off the tune. How do you put people off the tune? Nobody ever put me off.”

“Well, dear, you know your ear is not very true, I have often told you that. But I am hoping it will develop later.”

Janet took hold of one of her shell pink ears, and standing on tip-toe, tried to get a peep at it in the mirror above the sideboard. Then she looked at her mother closely. “My ears are just like yours, Mother, and you’re a lovely singer. Besides, I don’t sing with my ears anyway. It’s my throat, and I’m going to be a great singer some day, am I not?”

“Your voice will be true some day, I’m sure,” said her mother evasively. “Don’t cram the flowers in so tightly, Janet. Perhaps you wouldn’t mind if you left the choir and were in a dialogue instead, would you?”

But Janet wanted to be in the choir more than anything

else in the world. And the deepest reason was one she could not express to her mother. Daddy might understand, but she could scarcely tell even him. She did not mind so much not singing "We are scholars in the Sabbath School," nor "Good-night, God bless you!" though she considered them very lovely songs, indeed. But the other numbers were hymns of praise and thanksgiving to the dear Father in Heaven for the bountiful harvest He had given. And Janet could not bear to sit silent while all the other boys and girls hymned His praise; just as though she did not care, and did not thank Him for all His goodness. But it was very hard to put all this into words.

"Oh, I'd rather be in the choir than in every one of the dialogues, Mother!" she declared, and her mother, who always put off the evil day when she must tell Janet that she could not sing, changed the subject.

"Run away now, darling, and change your dress. It's time you were sitting down to your Sunday School lesson; and don't make a noise running past the study, for Daddy and Mr. Balfour are both there."

"Oh, Mother, can't I, please, wear this dress instead of my white one? I always feel so—so tidy in my white dress!"

"Janet, you are the strangest child. Don't you like that lovely lace dress Aunt Flora gave you?"

"Oh, I like it all right, Mother, when it's hanging in the closet. It's lovely then, but I have to take care of it so hard that I get stiff all inside me whenever I have it on."

"Dear me," complained her mother. "When I was a little girl like you I was never so happy as when I was dressed up in a pretty white frock. I really don't understand you, Janet."

Janet hung her head dejectedly. This white lace-frilled dress, that was so hard to launder, and that demanded such care, was a veritable hair shirt to the lively little girl. She regarded clothes as a troublesome but necessary covering. But why they should be made so that they had to be guarded

and cared for and watched, the way you had to watch Bud's baby-brother, was beyond her comprehension.

"This dress is so much more comfortabler," she sighed, looking down at her clean but faded blue morning gingham. "I always feel nice inside me, when I've got it on outside."

"You absurd child!" her mother laughed. "Why, there's a button off that dress at the back."

"It feels all right," said Janet, wriggling round enquiringly in the loose frock. "I think it feels better with that button off."

"What will Mr. Balfour think of you if he sees you in that old dress with a button off?" said her mother, trying to appeal to Janet's regard for the new member of the family.

"But he's seen me in this dress already, and he'll notice me far more if I put on another."

Janet had a remarkable taste for argument which her mother's uncertain control tended to foster. Her father was wont to say that it was the sweet reasonableness of Janet's nature that made her see both sides of a question, and prompted her to take the other side and argue the matter. But her mother was of the opinion quite to the contrary.

"But with a button off it," her mother continued, "I should think you'd be ashamed."

"He won't see the button—I mean the place where the button ought to be," said Janet comfortably. "I'll be sitting with my front to him and to everybody in Sunday School."

Her mother laughed again. Janet was such a queer little thing, she never quite took her seriously.

"You'll be likely to sit still very long! You'll be running to and fro and the whole congregation will see that empty button-hole."

Janet considered a while. She knew her weakness and had to confess that she would be quite likely to do a great deal of running before the day was over, though she always strove to keep quieter on Sundays, believing, with Kirsty,

that it was a great sin to be "cuttin' capers on the Lord's Day."

"Well," she cried, suddenly brightening with an inspiration, "I'll remember to run just *to* and not *fro* and then nobody'll see. Kirsty always says that I run round like a dog at a fair, Mother. What does she mean? How does a dog run at a fair?"

Her mother laughed again, and this time Janet laughed with her, very joyously, for when Mother laughed at the end of an argument it generally meant victory.

"I can go like this, can't I, Mother dear?" she asked eagerly.

But this time the laugh was a disappointment. The blue gingham was impossible; and her mother finally took the long delayed stand.

"Now, Janet, just stop this nonsensical talk about that dress," she declared firmly. "You can't wear it to church and Sunday School, and that's all about it. Why, your self-respect should demand that you must not wear a dress with a button off. It does not matter at all who does or does not see you, when you know yourself that your dress is not mended. Go at once and put on your white dress, and be a good little girl."

Janet went slowly and heavily up the stairs. From a light, dancing, airy creature in a frisking, blue gingham, she was suddenly transformed into a leaden-footed old woman with the prospect of a long day's imprisonment in a straight jacket of a white dress that demanded all one's thought and care to keep it in order. She dressed very slowly and solemnly. She drew on her white stockings and slippers as a prisoner might put his feet into the stocks, dragged on the white lacy dress over her head, and plodded wearily to her mother's room to be buttoned up the back.

"Now, that's the girlie," cried her mother. "Here are your sash and hair ribbons. Aren't they a pretty blue?"

These ribbons, which Aunt Flora had also inflicted upon Janet, were but so many more shackles, and she submitted to them with a weary sigh.

When the sash was adjusted in a big blue bow behind, and another butterfly bow was stuck upon the top of the riotous brown waves of her hair, and still another at the end of the long heavy braid, Janet felt as if she could not draw a full breath. She had no faintest notion that the ribbons made her deep grey eyes look blue behind their long shadowy lashes, or that she was a veritable fairy in her little lace skirts that stuck out around her. But her mother saw and kissed her happily. Mrs. Meldrum had great unspoken ambitions for Janet.

"That's Mother's darling," she said. "See how much better you look. Now get a clean handkerchief—are your nails nice?—and go downstairs and sit on the veranda and learn your verses and catechism, until it's time for Sunday School. And don't run or play with Pepper, or nurse the cat. And be nice and quiet so you won't disturb Mr. Bal-four."

Janet went down the stairs with the same aged and heavy tread. Pepper, who was sleeping in the sunlight on the veranda, leaped up and came towards her with a plain invitation for a romp. For Pepper was a very gay and irresponsible doggie, and took no thought of either clothes or the Sabbath.

Janet shook her head mournfully. "No, Peppy dear," she said sadly, "it's Sunday, and I've got on my best dress, and you must be a good dog and keep away from me."

The little dog looked at her for a moment, his head on one side to see if she really meant it. He backed up in an alluring slide and frisked to one side, then the other, with a sharp inviting bark. But as she made no response, he flopped heavily upon the veranda floor and sat watching her, ready the moment this strange mood should pass.

Janet arranged herself very carefully on a veranda stool, spreading her skirts out all around her lest they become crushed. She spread her white handkerchief upon her short lace lap, and laid her little Sunday School quarterly open upon it. She stretched out her white-shod feet in

front of her, and sat up straight and stiff, taking care of the white dress with all her might and main.

She had sat thus in misery for what seemed hours and hours, when a blessed diversion occurred. The wire door swung open, and the kind rescuer of yesterday stepped out. Hugh Balfour was very happy this morning. He liked his mother's old friends, he welcomed the thought of the work ahead of him, he enjoyed the freedom from the city, and he revelled in the glorious view of farm and woodland, orchard and river, golden hill and green valley that spread out before him.

To live on Cherry Hill was a liberal education; just to look outdoors made you feel as though the whole Province of Ontario was spread out at your feet. The country fell away from the height upon which the village was set, a lovely pageant of hill and dale, winding white road and winding blue river, golden field and green forest.

The newcomer stood motionless at the door gazing with delight over the lovely scene. He softly hummed the hymn with which he had started the morning:

"My God, I thank Thee, who hast made
This earth so bright,
So full of splendour and of joy,
Beauty and light,
So many glorious things are here,
Noble and right."

And then he turned and saw the small blue-and-white fairy sitting on the penitential stool.

"Oh, here you are!" he cried, delighted. "And how are you, again, this lovely bright morning?"

Janet Meldrum always spoke out the exact truth, and took no heed of polite conventional phrases.

"I'm very uncomfortable, thank you, Mr. Balfour," she answered soberly.

Mr. Balfour sat down in the hammock opposite, carefully lifting the tails of his long black coat. He was one of those rare, wise persons who do not treat a little girl

as if she were a funny toy, but a human being with human problems.

"I'm sorry to hear that," he said seriously. "What is the trouble? Do you mind telling me?"

Janet did not mind in the least. One of the chief trials of life was to keep from telling things.

"It's my dress," she announced with a great windy sigh.

"Your dress?" Hugh Balfour had a vague notion that, if a dress troubled a little girl, it was probably not fine enough, nor the proper colour.

"Why, I think it's a very pretty dress, indeed," he said.

"Oh, yes, I know; it's lovely," agreed Janet. "But that's just what's the matter. It's so nice I can't breathe in it, for fear I'll spoil it. You see, it's a very special dress, because Auntie Flora Bowman sent it to me, and it's a very, very expensive dress; and Kirsty says she'd rather take a thrashing than iron it. And when I wear it I can't do anything for fear I'll get a spot on it."

"That is rather too bad," he said without the smallest sign of amusement. "I have to take care of this coat, and I know what a trouble it is."

"Oh!" she broke out in sudden sympathy. "And do the buttons come off, too?"

"Indeed they do. And I have to sew them on myself."

"Oh, my! That's too bad! But you've got a mother to sew them on for you, haven't you?" she asked gently.

"Yes, but my mother is not with me when I'm at college, so she can't attend to my clothes, you see."

"And have you some brothers and sisters?" she asked eagerly.

"Yes, indeed; three brothers and two sisters, so I'm pretty well off after all, am I not? But I haven't a nice little sister at home. Mine are grown up."

"It must be nice to have a family. I haven't any, only Leola."

"Who's Leola?"

"She's my twin-sister, only I don't have her on Sundays, she's just for play-days."

Mr. Balfour looked puzzled. "Is Leola a dolly?" he asked.

"Oh, no. She's a big girl, and she's just my age, 'cause we're twins." She looked at him half-shyly from under her long lashes. Now that Janet had passed her tenth birthday, she was beginning to be just a little self-conscious regarding Leola. Nellie Gillespie had said it was very silly to pretend when you were a great big girl going on eleven.

"You see," she explained, "Leola is only a pretend sister. But I didn't have any other kind, and I thought a pretend one was better than none at all, don't you?"

Mr. Balfour agreed with her quite heartily. "But I'd rather have a brother than anything," went on Janet. "I don't mean a pretend brother, but a real one that can climb trees and holler like Bud Kelly. I've only got Blackie, my cat, and Pepper, but of course he's a lovely dog, don't you think so? Have you got a dog at home, Mr. Balfour?"

"Yes, a nice, big, shaggy, old fellow, and his name is Towser."

"What a nice name! And have you got a grandma, too?"

"Yes, my grandmother is a dear old lady, a real story-book Grandma, with white hair and lavender ribbons in her cap."

"Oh, what lots and lots of lovely things you have! And have you got a sweetheart?"

The catechised one was plainly a little disconcerted. "A what?" he asked in some confusion.

"A sweetheart," repeated Janet. "I mean a young lady that you're going to get married to," she explained kindly. "Miss Sinclair, she's my Sunday School teacher, and Miss Mitchell, she's my day-school teacher, and all the other young ladies at the church were talking about you one day last week; and they were wondering if you were going to be married. But perhaps," she added politely, "you'd rather not tell. Nellie Gillespie says she's sure her sister Marjorie is going to be married, but she won't tell one of them."

The visitor was laughing now. "Why, I'm sure I'd be

glad to tell, if I had any such nice secret. But I haven't a sweetheart at all, unless you'll be mine," he added.

Janet considered this gravely. "I'd like to, ever so much," she said at last, "but I wouldn't like to have an engagement ring, I'd be worried all the time for fear I'd lose it and Kirsty would scold me. But I guess I couldn't anyway," she added with a sigh of renunciation. "I'm sure Mother wouldn't let me. She said I must stay away from you and not talk to you, nor ask any questions." She stopped with a gasp of dismay. "Oh, I forgot that I wasn't to ask you questions! I didn't ask you so very, *very* many, did I?"

"Not many," he answered with more generosity than truth.

"Perhaps," she cried, brightening suddenly. "Perhaps Miss Lena would be your sweetheart. She's the dearest, loveliest lady in the world. Would you like me to ask her?"

"I don't believe you'd better," he said in some haste. "I'm quite sure the lady wouldn't like the idea. If you won't be my sweetheart I'll just have to do without."

"I wish," she started and then stopped.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I was going to ask you another question," she answered, "but I know I shouldn't."

"I don't think one more would do any harm," he said encouragingly.

"Oh!" she looked at him her eyes dazzling in their eagerness. "I'd just love to know what your whole name is!"

"Now, that's easy. My name's Hugh Hamilton Balfour, and I was called for Grandfather Hamilton. I don't believe I know your whole name, do I?"

"My name's Janet Matilda Leola Meldrum; Janet is Grandma Meldrum's name, and Matilda is Grandma Fraser's name, and Leola is just a name that Mother liked. Mother wanted to call me Leola, but Father said it sounded rather foolish to go with a plain Scotch name like Meldrum. I'm glad they didn't call me that, because I'd never know

who Mother wanted if she called Leola, because that's the name of my twin-sister. Oh, Mr. Balfour, would you mind telling me something more about your family, please, so I won't have to ask you questions? Will you?"

So he told her about his old home far away down in Nova Scotia, where they call the people Bluenoses. This word provoked a storm of questions, and when they were answered to her satisfaction he told her of his brothers and sisters and of the wonderful stretch of seashore where they used to play. Janet listened absorbed. She was so interested that she quite forgot the misery of the white dress, and was already twisting a corner of her sash end in her eagerness. But right in the midst of a fascinating story of how the tide chased them all home one day, the wire door swung open again and her father came slowly out.

Much hard work and ill health had stooped John Meldrum's thin frame and whitened his hair, but no amount of life's hardships could take the twinkle from his eye and the youthful brightness from his kind smile. His eyes danced as they rested on his little daughter.

"Now, Janet, Janet," he said, his thin hand caressing the little brown curly head, "I hope you haven't been asking Mr. Balfour too many questions. Come away, Hugh, and I'll show you over the church before Sunday School."

Janet watched them wistfully, as they walked across the lawn to the little gate that led into the church grounds. She had forgotten all about her dress in the fascinations of the new minister's company, but now its discomfort returned. She gave a loud groan as she took up her little Sunday School quarterly and began numbling over her verses. Janet learned all her lessons with lightning rapidity, and in a very few minutes she had memorized her two questions in the Catechism, her Golden Text and her three verses, and was looking around for something to do that would lighten the heavy hours and yet not be disastrous to her perishable neatness.

Just then, from the lilac bush at the end of the veranda came a little song. Under Bud Kelly's tuition Janet had

studied the language of the birds, and she had no difficulty in translating this one's delightful trill:

"Chee-chee-chee-chee-chee, Chip!
Watch Out!
Keep the Day!"

He was warning her, just as surely as Kirsty had, to be careful not to break the Sabbath. Janet rose softly and tip-toed to the end of the veranda to get a closer view of the little singer.

And then she heard a sound that made her leap to the railing. It was a loud, grievous, "*Pee-eeep, Pee-eeep!*" rising in anguished crescendo from the street, and a little yellow duckling went waddling past the gate, his yellow bill raised in loud lamentations over his lost and forlorn condition; his short legs and his wide feet making but poor progress through the long dusty grass of the road side.

"Oh, oh, Tommy! Tommy Kelly!" cried Janet in a burst of pity.

Tommy Duck was as much a member of the Kelly family as Bud or baby Cornelius. He was a lone duckling which, in true Kelly fashion, had somehow got mishatched into a family of chickens. His poor little life was one long conflict between his love for his family and his passion for water. Tom was always running down to the creek behind the house in obedience to some inner compulsion; and when he had had a lovely swim was always finding himself orphaned, with his mother leading the rest of the family far afield on a grasshopper hunt.

Janet and Bud had named each member of the family, and she had called the little duckling Tom, after the hero of "*The Water Babies.*" Janet was sure he was a real Water Baby in disguise, and it seemed too bad that he should have nothing better for his companions than long-legged chickens, who went on swift excursions through the grass and would die if they went near the creek.

Nevertheless Tom loved his uncongenial family, and was in misery without them, and here he was lost as usual, calling and crying, and waddling along as fast as his short

legs would carry him. Janet forgot all about the white dress and blue silk sash.

"Oh, Tom! Poor Tommy! Come to Janet! Duckie, Duckie!" she called.

Tom heard the familiar voice and answered with a little comforted quack, quack. He stopped at the gate for a moment; then, thinking he heard his mother call, he suddenly turned and darted out into the dusty road, his neck out-thrust, his tiny imitation wings held aloft.

And he ran right into a terrible danger. Just across the village street from the Manse was the Caldwell home, behind a glowing hedge of dahlias. The Caldwells were very proud of their garden and very careful of it. And above all other pests they feared the collection of chickens, rabbits, dogs and children which was liable to overflow the bounds of the Kelly yard at any moment and destroy everything beautiful in the neighborhood. Consequently the Caldwell dog was so well trained that if he so much as heard a Kelly rooster crow, he bristled and growled. And if one of the Kelly fowl but put his profaning claw on the well-trimmed Caldwell boulevard, he was ready for the Kelly pot that moment. Bugler was lying on the veranda, at this minute pretending to sleep, his wise old nose between his paws. He opened one wicked eye at the sound of poor little Tom's wail, and spied the little duckling coming straight for his sacred gate. Bugler came off the veranda in one bound, with a roar that fairly shook the calm of the Sabbath air. Tommy Duck heard, and with a squawk of terror he turned and fled back across the street towards Janet's gate. There seemed no hope for him, for Bugler was right at his flat yellow heels. But Janet was coming across her lawn in leaps that matched Bugler's, Pepper bounding by her side. Her garden was much smaller than the wide Caldwell lawn and Tom was coming towards her; so they won in the race. Fortunately the big dog was one of Janet's intimate friends; and he stopped suddenly at her screamed command. Janet caught up the terrified duckling in her arms. He had just come out of the Kelly

water trough, and had trailed up and down in the dust of the village street, but she hugged him close to her white lace and blue silk, and poured forth a stream of pitying and endearing words, mingled with scoldings addressed sternly to Bugler for his inhospitable conduct. Bugler seemed quite ashamed of himself, for he stood with his tail hanging and looked quite abashed, while Pepper danced about and said quite plainly in dog-language, "Ah, ha, I told you so."

And the next moment there was a rush of bare feet, a cloud of dust, and Bud Kelly, in an un-Sabbath-like costume of a faded shirt and a pair of very ragged trousers, held up by one frail strap, came storming upon the scene.

"Oh, Jenny!" he shouted. "Oh, say! You're the dandiest!" His thin bare legs went up in the air, his red head went down in the dust and he pranced about on his hands in a vain attempt to express his admiration.

"Say, Jenny," he cried, bringing himself back with a jerk to the commonly accepted position of human beings—"Say! You—you'd ought to 'a' been a boy!"

Janet fairly glowed with pride. To be praised by Bud was better even than being a great singer, and receiving the applause of thousands. And then she came down from the rosy heights and landed in the dust; for her mother's voice in pained astonishment came from the veranda.

"Janet, child! What can you be doing?"

Janet hurriedly shoved Tommy into Bud's hands and looked at her dress. The Water Baby had left the pattern of his wide feet all over the front and it was smeared with mud from lace collar to lace hem. She turned and came slowly up the walk, looking like a bad charcoal sketch of the blue and white fairy that had sat on the veranda but a few minutes before. At the same moment her father and their guest came through the little gate from the church and crossed the lawn to meet her.

Mrs. Meldrum was a wise woman in many ways, and was generally calm in the face of catastrophe. Ten years of moving accident by dirt and water, commencing the day

Janet had begun to creep, had inured her to disaster. So she took the bedraggled little wreck upstairs without a word. They were all ready to start for Sunday School when Janet appeared again, dressed in a dark blue cotton frock. She tried hard not to show her pleasure in the new costume, for she was genuinely sorry over the work she had given poor Kirsty. Her mother looked flushed and worried. She liked to have Janet well dressed, especially on Sundays with the whole congregation to look at her, but her father was at some pains to keep the twinkle out of his eyes.

"It was a gallant rescue, all the same," he declared. And Janet caught his hand in both hers and hugged it close to her heart. She was very humble as she walked by the new minister's side to Sunday School. "I'm so sorry for poor Mother," she said. "I'm such a bother to her and Kirsty. Children are a great care, Mr. Balfour," she added solemnly. "When you get married you'd better not have any. I guess I got all over mud to-day because I wore Mrs. Gibbie's bonnet yesterday. Do you think I did?"

There was no time to discuss the possible connection between her mischievous conduct of the day before and the present disaster; but just before church he saw the little blue figure standing beside the owner of the black bonnet. The kind, old, wrinkled face was bent towards the childish one, and Janet was whispering something. And old Mrs. Gibbie Gibson, who was fortunately very deaf, and had not heard one word of the confession, smiled and patted her on the head and Janet came away absolved and happy.

CHAPTER V

PROMOTED TO THE TOP SHELF

KNOX CHURCH realised that it had done a rash and unprecedented thing in choosing a mere college boy to take their pastor's place during his absence. Moreover, they had placed him in this exalted position without so much as hearing whether he could preach at all or not. To be sure Mr. and Mrs. Meldrum had both known his people well, and could vouch for their respectability; and Old Gibbie Gibson, one of the elders, had taken occasion to visit and examine the young man when he was in Toronto at the Exhibition, and had pronounced him sound in theology. Yet the congregation felt they were taking serious risks and might have to pay for their foolhardiness.

But when Hugh Balfour came down from the pulpit on Sunday morning, there was but one verdict. He would do. Even his extremely youthful appearance, which at first alarmed the older folk, proved an asset.

"He seems just like a nice shy boy," said Mrs. Gillespie to her husband, the Cherry Hill doctor. "And he preached us a fine sermon. But he's young and good-looking and I'm afraid he'll spend too much time running round with the girls."

"He seems so kind-a free spoken, just like as if he was one of our own boys," said Mrs. Andrew Sinclair to Mrs. Caldwell as they walked home together. "I think he'll be fine visitin' round. But I'm afraid he won't be much of a preacher compared to Mr. Meldrum."

"I do hope he'll spend his time on the young people and get them organised for work," said Willie Beckett, the Sunday School superintendent. "We've a lot of hardened

old sinners in this church that the minister may as well leave alone."

"I hope he won't waste his time on the young folk," said old Gibbie Gibson, the elder, as he and his wife plodded homeward across the pasture-field; she with her ample skirts held up in either hand, he a couple of yards ahead, shouting back to her. "The older folk need to be visited more, and there's nothin' to be gained by a minister runnin' round with a lot o' light-headed callants to tea-splashes."

And so with all these varied hopes set upon him, Hugh Balfour commenced his ministry. Very humbly and very tremblingly he took up the burden, on the day that he said farewell to his chief, at the railway station in the neighboring town.

For a few days after Mr. Meldrum's departure a deep gloom settled over the bare rooms of the old grey Manse. Mrs. Meldrum was silently brooding over her trouble, filled with sad foreboding. Janet's big eyes filled with tears whenever her father was mentioned, and Kirsty was wrapped in a forbidding gloom, that somehow conveyed to the young man the impression that the minister had been driven ruthlessly from his home and it was entirely his fault.

For a time the young man was so busy getting acquainted with his people, organising his autumn's work, and undertaking the heavy task of a weekly sermon, that he had no time to see much of the little girl who came and went like a sunbeam. He often heard her fly through the house when she came home from school, or saw her playing ball with the wild Irish family on the other side of the church. And he always met her at meal time, when she had a great deal to say, which had to be poured forth in intermittent streams, frequently shut off by a look or word from her mother.

But while he saw very little of her, she was watching him closely, and cataloguing him in her own peculiar way. Janet had a scale by which she measured all her friends. She had borrowed it from Kirsty's big fruit cupboard in the cellar. There were three shelves in this cupboard, each containing a different grade of jams and preserves. On

the bottom shelf were the commoner and cheaper brands, rhubarb conserve, crab-apple jam, odds and ends, or left-overs from various picklings and preservings, and all designated by Kirsty the "Pickin's and Leavin's."

Next above was the largest shelf. It contained all the substantial jars; strawberries, cherries, plums, and all the varied fruits that the changing season afforded. They were the table's chief support in the long winter, and Kirsty called them her "Stand Bys." The top shelf was reserved for the very finest and best. Here were small jars of rare English cherries, damson plum, peach, and pineapple, and carefully prepared glasses of grape jelly. Nothing was elevated to the top shelf that was not of the finest quality, and when it was filled in the late autumn, Kirsty regarded her cupboard with pride and contentment, and announced that her "Tasty Bits" were complete.

And so in like manner Janet had arranged all her friends and acquaintances on three mental shelves.

On the lowest were the "Pickin's and Leavin's." Most of the inhabitants at this lower stratum were people she did not know very well; for Janet disliked no one. There were one or two of the big girls at school who thought little girls were a bother; Kelly, Senior, who was father to Bud, and a very poor sort of father too, and Spotty Cameron, who brought the snake into school, and always gave poor Miss Mitchell so much trouble.

Except for these, the lowest shelf was practically empty. The best filled one was the next, where all the steady "Stand Bys" were set. Almost everyone in Knox Church stood firmly on this level. But the top shelf was reserved for rare souls, and very few were found worthy to dwell in the lofty region of the "Tasty Bits." Her father and mother and Kirsty were here, of course, and Nellie Gillespie and all the Kelly children; Miss Lena Sinclair had a conspicuous place here; but Miss Mitchell, on account of a sharp tongue and uncertain discipline, was left with the "Stand Bys."

Mr. Balfour was not difficult to place. Being a minister

and a member of the family, she felt that he properly belonged to the "Stand Bys." But though she liked him very much, she could not forget that he was taking Daddy's place and she had no thought of raising him to a greater height.

And then, suddenly, by one act, he lifted himself to the top shelf of Janet's affections to stand there forever.

As the days went by he felt that while he was making progress in the congregation, he was not getting acquainted with his own household. The tall forbidding woman whose word was law beyond the dining-room door, he found unapproachable. She was a wonderful cook, and made pie crust as short as her temper, but though she was never absent from church or prayer-meeting, she still continued to treat him as though he were directly responsible for the ill health and consequent absence of Mr. Meldrum.

The minister's wife, he found, had so many calls and cares outside her home, that she was away most of the time. Mrs. Meldrum was the leader in all the activities of her own church, but her ambition led her far beyond Cherry Hill. There was a convention here or a conference there, a meeting to address, or a committee to call together. The young man was lost in amazed admiration of her energy.

He had made such a propitious opening to his acquaintance with Janet that he felt puzzled when he found the little girl trying to avoid him. Janet did not seem to be shy, she met everyone with a friendly fearlessness, and he was at a loss to know why she suddenly slipped away or grew very quiet whenever he approached.

He found her one afternoon feeding her chickens, when he came in from a visit, and was putting the minister's little muddy car into its shed.

"Good day," he cried genially, coming over to the little fenced enclosure where the hens were kept. "And how is all your family to-day?"

Janet started and looked alarmed. "Oh! Is your sermon ready for Sunday?" she asked with apparent irrelevance.

"Well, not quite," he confessed. "You see it's only Tuesday."

"But to-morrow night's prayer-meeting," she went on anxiously. "And you have to get ready for that, don't you?"

"Yes; but I think I'm almost ready," he answered, wondering why she was so solicitous. "Please, Miss School-ma'am, you won't scold me if I don't work all the time, will you?"

Janet always saw the joke; she giggled appreciatively.

"Why are you so anxious about my sermons," he asked, looking down at her with twinkling eyes.

"Because Mother said I wasn't to ever talk to you unless your sermons were ready. She says I'll be sure to spoil them because I talk so much. And old Mr. Gibbie Gibson told Mother that your sermon last Sunday wasn't as good as your first one, and he told Mother to be sure and not let me make a noise when you were studying. He says you need to study an awful lot." Janet looked up at him with troubled eyes. "It would be dreadful if I was to spoil all your sermons, wouldn't it?" she asked.

The young minister's eyes reflected something of the worry in hers. But it was the fear that the Mr. Gibbie Gibsons in the congregation would make sermonising difficult rather than little Janet's chatter.

"Don't worry about the sermons," he said smiling. "I'm quite sure you couldn't spoil them if you tried," he added with grim humour which Janet did not appreciate. He looked down at the noisy group gathered about the pan of water she had poured out for them. "See how the hens raise their heads whenever they take a drink," he continued hastily, fearful of hearing more comment upon his discourses. "I wonder what makes them do it?"

"Oh, don't you know?" asked Janet in surprise. "Why, they're looking up to heaven and saying, 'Thank the Lord.' I know they are, because I heard that old white hen there saying it out loud one day. They all have a funny way of talking, and sometimes I can't make out what they say.

Bud knows every word his hens say. But I think our hens must talk Gaelic, because they talk exactly the way Kirsty does to her sister when she comes here. Don't you think they're smart hens to talk Gaelic, when nobody taught them, Mr. Balfour? Kirsty taught me some words, but I can't say nearly as many as the black hen. But sometimes the white hen speaks our words, and one day, after I'd fed her, she went round saying, "Go-l-God-God-God-God-be-thank-it!" just like that. Listen, she's doing it now."

"She certainly is!" he cried, listening in surprise to the white hen repeating the words exactly as Janet had reported. "The Plymouths can say it too," she went on, "and Buffy, she's that pretty brown one over there scratching, she says grace just like Miss Lena's father does when I go there for supper. Only she says it in the middle of a meal, and he always says it before."

They had a very delightful time feeding the chickens, and then Mr. Balfour played with Pepper and admired Blackie's stately air and handsome coat; and they went indoors and upstairs together, chatting in the most friendly manner. Janet's mother was away attending a meeting of the Women's Canadian Club in Algonquin, along with Lennie Caldwell's mother, and this unexpected companionship was very delightful to the lonely little girl; but when they came to the study door she stepped back hastily.

"Come away in here and visit me a little while," he said, throwing the door open. She shook her head. "No, thank you; I used to come in every day when Daddy was home," she said, a wistful look coming into her deep grey eyes at the mention of her father, "But I didn't seem to hurt his sermons so much. I guess Daddy was used to my noise, or else he was used to writing sermons; and you see you're just starting."

"But I'm not going to write anything just now," he persisted.

Janet's eyes shone. "Oh, do you think I could come in for a minute?" she whispered. "I'm afraid Mother wouldn't like it."

"But it must be quite all right if I invite you," he assured her. "And I invite you right now."

She stepped in, carefully, on tip-toe; and, seating herself primly on the extreme edge of the sofa, she folded her hands and looked up at him rapturously.

"Oh, Mr. Balfour, I think you must be just like God!" she exploded.

"Oh, dear, dear, that's rather overwhelming!" he cried in dismay. "If you like me so much, you must come and see me often. I like little girls."

"Oh, do you?" she bounced up and down happily. "Will you invite me in again if I try not to be a bother?"

"Indeed I will."

"When will you invite me?"

"Soon; to-morrow if you like."

"There! now!" she cried triumphantly. "I told Mother I was sure you would like to have me, but she said you were just trying to be polite, because I was Father's little girl."

The dog and cat, emboldened by their mistress's presence, came wandering in after her; Blackie, stately and dignified, as if he wished everyone to know that he was acquainted with the proper social usage, and recognised that this was not quite the thing; Pepper, in his usual hail-fellow-well-met manner, delighted to come and quite sure his host was equally glad to meet him.

Janet looked at them apologetically. "I'm afraid if I visit you, my children will come, too," she said, "and they are as much bother as I am. But Peppy isn't a bad doggie, is he? And don't you think Blackie is a darling?"

She lifted the big black cat onto her knee, and gently stroked his beautiful fur.

"How shall I know if you'd like me to come and see you to-morrow?" she continued. "When I come home from school and the study door is shut, I don't know whether you're in or out. And I listen at the key-hole," she went on, with cheerful frankness, "and I hear your chair creak or your pen scratch, and then I have to keep quiet."

"Just knock on the door and if I say 'Come in,' why, that is a sign I'm here, and that I want you."

She shook her head. Evidently the matter had all been threshed out. "Mother said that if I knocked on the door you would be too polite to tell me to run away. Children are a dreadful bother, Mr. Balfour," she said, with an unconscious imitation of her mother's manner. "You don't know, because you haven't had any. But perhaps if I knocked on your door, and asked you if you intended to invite me, it wouldn't be so bold, would it?" she added hopefully.

Kirsty rang the supper bell before they had decided upon any satisfactory plan, and they ran downstairs hand in hand, still discussing it. Janet sat at the head of the table and poured out his tea, desperately careful about cream and sugar.

They had a delightful meal, and Janet talked all she wanted to. They sat so long at the table that Kirsty looked in from the kitchen and cleared her throat ominously, and they fled upstairs to the study again.

And then Mr. Balfour hit upon the plan that put him on the top shelf with the "Tasty Bits."

"I'll tell you," he cried, "whenever I want you to come into the study I'll put out a flag. I've got a little silk one in my trunk."

He ran to his room, Janet accompanying him, vastly interested to see inside his trunk and asking innumerable questions about everything she saw.

The flag was produced and its history told, also the history, use, and meaning of every article in the trunk which Janet's eyes lighted upon. Then she rushed away to her own room, and rummaged madly in the drawer of her little dresser, scattering things in all directions, and came flying back, Pepper and the black cat at her heels. She had found a piece of red ribbon that matched the red of the flag. They tied it to the staff of the flag and fastened it in a pretty loop so that it could be slipped easily over the knob of the door. When it was finally hung in place Janet danced up

and down on her toes while Pepper danced on his hind legs and barked with joy.

Then they had to see if the plan would work. Janet went to her room and shut herself in, while he hung out the flag, shut the study door and sat down at his desk again. A moment after, Janet came down the hall, telling Pepper they had better go out for a walk, as there was no one in the house to talk to. Then she looked up, saw the flag, went up very demurely to the door and knocked. A cordial "Come in" sounded; and Janet entered to find Mr. Balfour sitting at his desk. He looked up surprised.

"Why, Janet! I'm so glad you called!" he exclaimed. "Did you see the flag on the door? I was afraid you were out."

Janet's eyes were fairly blazing. "Yes, I happened to notice it and I thought you might be lonesome, so I dropped in for a few minutes. I'm sorry I can't stay long."

But she did stay a very long time indeed; so long that she forgot all about bedtime, till Kirsty appeared at the door to ask her if she intended to sit up all night.

She was almost too happy to sleep, but, before she floated into dreamland, she had placed her new friend in a most important position on the top shelf of her friendship cupboard.

CHAPTER VI

THE SILENT SINGER

WELL, something's got to be done about this youngsters' choir, and done quick!"

Miss Martha Beckett slammed the little organ shut, and stood up facing the exhausted leader of the choir. Practice was over; the children had gone storming out into the street; and the young ladies who had been struggling with them were holding a council of war. The juvenile choir which was in training for the annual Sunday School supper and concert had swelled until it overflowed the platform. And the young ladies who were striving to bring harmony out of its noisy chaos, had finally come to the conclusion that its numbers must be reduced, or its leaders would speedily join the choir invisible.

"You're the one that ought to do the weeding out, Lena," said Marjorie Gillespie. "I'll make our Nell and Kitty stay home if you like."

"No, you won't," cried Miss Beckett, rearranging her picture hat before her mirror. "Your kids can sing, but we've got a crowd here that can't sing any better than our old turkey-gobbler. You take a holt o' them at the very next practice, Lena, and yank out everybody that can't sing. And you'd better start with young Janet Meldrum, even if the new minister does make a pet of her." She darted a significant glance around.

Lena Sinclair looked unhappy. She was a tall, quiet girl, with a pale unattractive face; but a sweet unselfish spirit looked out from her dark eyes and redeemed her face from plainness. The eyes were very kind just now.

"I can't do it, Martha. The dear little things all want to be in it. I'd rather have the music spoiled."

"Let's ask Mr. Balfour to pick out the best singers," suggested Miss Mitchell, who was a Methodist when she was in her own home, and rather enjoyed showing a lack of respect for the Presbyterian minister. "You ask him, Lena. He's the minister, and it's his duty to do all the disagreeable jobs around the church."

But before the young man could be made a victim, Providence, or some less beneficent power, opened up a way out of the difficulty. Next Sunday, as Lennie passed up the church aisle, he gave Janet a sharp poke. Janet was sitting at the end of the Manse pew and almost jumped out of her seat with surprise. This was most astonishing, for Lennie was always so well behaved. Following the Caldwell family with her eyes, as they filed into their pew, she understood. There was a stranger sitting next to Lennie's father. Janet had heard all about him at school the week before. He was Lennie's father's cousin, and the Caldwells had spread the news of his coming far and wide. He was an organist in a big church in the city, he had a string of letters at the end of his name, and Doctor at the beginning, and he wore a black gown over his clothes when he went into the church to play the organ on Sundays. The Caldwells were inclined to be uppish and to exaggerate everything that reflected glory upon the family. The present Mrs. Caldwell had been a school-teacher, and thought herself a little above her neighbours. Indeed it was said that she tried to give the impression, to those who knew no better, that Grandpa Caldwell had been a near relative to the historic Duke, instead of his gardener.

Of course the visitor had to be asked to play the organ, and he went right up to the choir loft and took Martha Beckett's seat. When church was over Mr. Balfour came down to him and said he had not dreamed that their little organ could produce such harmonies. But his enthusiasm was not shared by many. Indeed almost everyone said they would rather hear Martha Beckett play any day, and

young Mrs. Gibbie Gibson, who had a sharp tongue, remarked that perhaps he couldn't play so well without his gown on, a remark that was repeated far and wide and laughed over long after the great organist had gone back to the city.

But Martha Beckett had her revenge. Since she was obliged to give up playing the organ on Sunday to cater to the Caldwell pride, she was determined to get something out of it. No sooner was the benediction pronounced than she walked over to the visitor and asked him if he would come over to the church on Monday afternoon and test the children's voices, they wanted to pick out about twenty of the best singers for the anniversary choir. If the Caldwells got into trouble over it, she whispered aside to Miss Mitchell, they could write to the Duke about it.

The organist was a kindly disposed elderly gentleman, and was quite willing to help all these nice little girls who were working so hard to get up a concert. So after school on Monday he walked over to the church and right into the trap.

Martha Beckett had announced his coming; and the long crowded rows of trembling choristers were waiting for him. They all regarded him with apprehensive eyes, and Jimsey Kelly burst into a loud wail at the sight of him.

So, to put them all at their ease, the visitor sat down at the little organ and played and sang a song. It was a very funny song, indeed; about a bullfrog that lived in a pond, and a crow that lived upon the bank, and how they tried to sing a duet; while all the other crows in the field, and all the other frogs in the pond interfered. It was so comical that the little choir fairly rolled off its seat with laughter; and before the fun had subsided the organist was calling them up in twos and threes to sing for him, and nobody was half as frightened as he had expected to be.

When they had sung the line of a hymn or a song, or anything at all that they liked, he divided them into two groups, the singers he sent back to the platform, the rejected ones he handed over to Miss Sinclair. It was all done very

kindly indeed, and with so many jokes that it seemed like a delightful game. And Miss Lena Sinclair helped him by appearing very glad indeed when she received a new discard, and welcomed each with, "Here's another boy for my dialogue, just what I wanted," or "Miss Mitchell, I know you'll be glad to have another little girl to help you in that lovely drill you're getting up."

But for all this, Janet's heart sank as she approached the testing place. She was very, very much afraid of being put out of the choir. She felt it would be dreadful if she were not allowed to stand with the singers on anniversary night and chant that hymn of thanksgiving:

"Father, unto Thee we raise
This our sacrifice of praise!"

She and Nellie came up before the great man together, holding tightly to each other's hands. Nellie was trembling with nervousness over singing all alone, and before such an audience. Janet was equally frightened, but for a different reason. She would have sung "The Holy City" before all Cherry Hill without a qualm, but she was terribly afraid of what her singing might bring upon her.

"Don't sing loud, Jenny," whispered Nellie. "You sound better, when you sing away down in your wind-pipe," and Janet promised, grateful for the advice from one who really knew all about singing as Nellie did.

Nellie was chosen first. She stood up before the big man, her eyes on the floor, her curls bobbing with nervousness, her hands twisting her short, plaid skirt into a ball behind her, and sang a stanza of "God sees the little sparrow fall"; piping it forth in a true, silvery voice, as sweet and clear as a song sparrow itself. The music-man smiled, patted her curls, told her she was a canary, and steered her straight towards the growing choir that was gathering on the platform. Then he turned smiling to Janet.

"Now, Grey Eyes," he said, sounding a chord on the short-breathed little organ. "You sing the same, like a good, little robin-red-breast."

Janet sang it, just as much like Nellie as possible. She could have sung it with four times the power and volume; but remembering Nellie's injunction that it would sound better down in her wind-pipe, she chanted it in a low droning voice, all on one or two notes, and in a melancholy minor.

Martha Beckett giggled; Lena Sinclair flushed and looked distressed; and Miss Mitchell said quite loud enough for Janet to hear, "What a raucous voice the poor child has!" The great organist looked very kind. He stroked Janet's untidy, brown braid gently.

"Your ear will develop later, little one," he said in an even nicer voice than he had used to Nellie. "I know Miss Sinclair, there, wants a bright little girl like you to give a recitation or something. You show her what a fine elocutionist you can be!"

When the dreadful ordeal was all over, Janet dragged herself homeward, walking along the very bottom of the Slough of Despond. Nellie walked on one side, Bud on the other, striving vainly to administer comfort.

"Aw, who cares about the old choir," scoffed Bud. "I'd just as soon not be in it, anyhow."

"I don't believe I'll stay in either," declared Nellie, putting her arm around Janet. "I don't care even if we aren't great singers, Janet, do you? I'd rather be a dressmaker. Marjorie says they make more money. An' Susie's put out, an' Bella an' Tim, an' I don't want to be in it without you." Bud further offered to go and throw a stone through the Caldwell window and smash their old rubber plant. But Janet refused both generous offers. There was no comfort to be gained from the sacrifice of her friends. She went slowly up the garden walk, not even noticing Pepper and Blackie who came to meet her.

She would never, never be a great singer after all; and she had intended to sing like Sylvia Ward some day. And she had not only been put out of the choir, but her very own teacher, whom she loved almost next to Miss Lena, had said she had a raucous voice! And who knew what

dreadful depths of meaning might lurk in a word with such an ominous sound as *raucous*.

Janet kept repeating it over and over as she went in search of her mother. But Mother was out as usual. Janet remembered that she had gone to a meeting over at the church. She dragged herself on through the empty rooms to the kitchen. Kirsty might have a short temper, but her sympathy was long and deep, and she was always a kindly refuge whenever a little girl happened to come home with a scratch or a bruise.

But this happened to be an unfortunate occasion. Kirsty was putting the last touches to the icing of a cake, and grumbling aloud to herself as was her habit when she was annoyed. The cake was destined for the quilting over at the church, and Kirsty was giving her opinion of church teas to the stove and the table.

"Eatin' an' drinkin'; drinkin' an' eatin'; an' all in the name o' releegion! Turnin' the Lord's hoose intil a den o' thieves——"

Janet turned and fled. The kitchen was no place for her when Kirsty was in this humour. Beside, she suddenly remembered with dismay that Kirsty strongly disapproved of all choirs, little or big, and would look upon her expulsion as a kind interposition of Providence.

There was one forlorn hope of comfort, the flag might be on the study door; Janet plodded drearily up the stairs. Since the flag signal had been arranged, she had spent many happy hours in the study, and often when Mr. Balfour went out in the afternoon he left the flag hanging to the door-knob as an invitation to her to play in the study till he returned. Yes, the flag was there to-day, but Mr. Balfour was not! There was no one in the wide world to whom she could go with her trouble. Then she caught sight of the big dictionary on the desk. At least she could hunt down that mysterious word "*raucous*," and know the worst.

The tears were so near the surface now that she could scarcely read, and she had looked all down a page beginning with "*raw*" without finding anything that might sound like

"raw-cus," when the front door banged, and Mr. Balfour came whistling up the stairs, just as if everyone was happy and nobody had ever been put out of a choir in the wide world!

He stopped suddenly on the threshold. The little drooping figure bent over the dictionary, the flushed face and tearful eyes told him there was something sadly amiss. Janet rarely cried, and when she did he knew there was a serious cause.

"Good-day, little lady!" he cried cheerfully. "Want the meaning of a big word? Perhaps I can help. Was it a word you misspelled in school?"

"No—it wasn't in school," said Janet, holding back the tears by a great effort. "It was a word that—a word Miss Mitchell said at choir practice."

"Was it a musical term? Must have been *Fortissimo*," he said with a smile at his own joke.

"No, it wasn't that," said Janet, making a pathetic attempt to answer his smile. "It sounded like raw-cus, but I've looked all over 'r-a-w' and I can't find it."

"Oh, raucous," he said. "It means——" he hesitated, fearing he might be adding to the trouble. "How did she use it?"

Janet went over to the sofa, and sat down on it very straight. She folded her hands tightly in her pink gingham lap. She was determined not to cry, so the telling of the tragic story took some time. But it was told at last. She had been put out of the choir; because she had something the matter with her ears, and Nellie was left in; and Miss Mitchell had told the great organist that she had a "raw-cus" voice, and she feared it meant something very bad indeed.

She took hold of one ear and twisted her neck, and turned her eyes in a vain attempt to see what was the matter.

"Aren't my ears all right, Mr. Balfour? And what does 'raw-cus' mean?"

Mr. Balfour came over and sat upon the sofa beside her.

This was a difficult and delicate question which he had foreseen would have to be dealt with. He felt sorry that he happened to be the one to meet it. But he did not evade it as her mother had always done.

"It's not the right word at all, Janet," he said, experiencing a feeling of rage against the perpetrator of the word raucous. "It means harsh." He felt that her crystal honesty demanded utter frankness in return. "But that is a great mistake, and Miss Mitchell didn't mean it, I'm sure. Your voice is very sweet and musical. The trouble isn't with your voice at all. You see it's this way. When we hear a tune sung, there is a little instrument in our ears that tells us just exactly the way to sing it. And our ears tell our throat, and then the throat makes the sounds exactly the same. And some people haven't got that little instrument in their ears grown so that it does its work just perfectly. I think that is what is the matter with you, but you will likely get it when you are a little older. I know a great many very, very clever people who are like that, and they cannot sing. But you are only a little girl and you may be able to sing with the best some day."

The telling of it had hurt him more than it had her. She was comforted a little, but there were signs that the tears were still being held back.

"Perhaps if I had an operation I might be all right?" she suggested bravely. "Cousin Billy, he's Aunt Flora's little boy, and he had adenoids, and Mother said his ears were very bad, and then he had an operation and had the adenoids cut out and his ears were all right. Do you think that would do me any good? I don't think I'd like to have anything cut out of me."

"I don't think I would worry about it at all if I were you," he said comfortingly. "There are so many, many nice things to do in the world beside sing."

And then she tried, in a halting way, to tell him the deepest reason for wanting to be in the choir. She did not like to be left among those who could not sing the praises of their Father in Heaven, she said falteringly. Didn't he

remember the hymn, "Jesus loves to hear the children"? It was difficult to explain it, but he seemed to understand without being told. He sat looking at her for a moment, thinking.

"Did you ever hear a story called 'The Unsung Magnificat,' Janet?" he asked.

The drooping little figure straightened again at the mention of a story.

"No, I'd love to hear it; but maybe you haven't time to tell one. Have you got to write a sermon?"

"No, the sermon can wait. I'm going to tell you a story about some people who thought they couldn't sing and they were all wrong."

He leaned back among the cushions and began in the old alluring way, "Once upon a time." The breeze danced in at the window and ruffled Janet's hair and dried her tears as she listened. It was the beautiful old legend; how the good monks of the fen-lands had such hoarse unpleasant voices that they felt they never did justice to the great Magnificat—the anthem they chanted every Christmas Eve:

"My soul doth magnify the Lord."

And so one Christmas Eve they sent for young Brother Thomas of the silvery voice to come and sing for them. And that night the monks all knelt in the chapel, spellbound, listening while the sweet silvery tones of Brother Thomas floated out through the windows, and into the clear, frosty night; and it seemed to them as if the angels were singing.

And all the good monks went to bed that night happy, for they said to themselves that the angels in heaven, and God Himself, would be pleased because for once the Magnificat had been sung fittingly.

But that night, when all the Abbey was sleeping, each monk in his little cell, the old Abbot was awakened by a wonderful light shining around him. And there stood a beautiful angel, looking sad and reproachful. And the angel said: "All these years, every Christmas Eve, the Magnificat has sounded in heaven, sung so sweetly by the

good fathers of this Fen-land. But to-night no song reached heaven. Why was it," he asked, oh, so sorrowfully, "that the monks neglected to sing the Magnificat?"

And the good old Abbot answered, amazed, and a little fearful, that it had been sung, that very evening, in the chapel; sung gloriously, by young Brother Thomas, and far better than it had ever been sung by them with their poor, harsh voices.

And then the angel answered that they had made a grave mistake. For it was only the singing that came from the heart that could reach heaven, and Brother Thomas sang only with his voice, and thought more of his silvery tones than he did of praising God. And though the good monks had hoarse, harsh voices, they sounded in heaven as the sweetest music; so that the angels stopped singing to listen; for it was the real singing of praise, right from the heart.

The little girl sat motionless, gazing at the story teller as if her eyes would devour him.

"So, you see, one can be a great singer without a voice—a silent singer," Mr. Balfour went on. "Our Father is just as pleased, because real praise comes only from the heart. You can be one of His little silent singers. Did you ever hear that text, 'Singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord'?"

"Oh, yes, I know it," cried Janet eagerly. "We had it for our Golden Text last winter. I know where to find it in the Bible, too!"

She jumped up and got her father's big Bible off the desk, found the text and read it, her eyes shining.

They sat and talked about it until Mother came in from the meeting. And it was a happy little girl, instead of a heart-broken one, who ran to tell her that, though she had been put out of the anniversary choir, she was going to be a singer for all that.

CHAPTER VII

THE WASP CHORUS

JANET came dancing down her gladioli-bordered path in the morning sunlight to meet Lennie coming out sedately from his trim garden. Lennie was always quiet and well-behaved and did not yell and leap on the way to school as the Kelly children did. Janet waited for him, hopping up and down on one foot, as he picked his way across the dusty road, his mother calling to him to be careful not to get his shoes dirty.

Away down the street Janet could see Nellie at her gate, and spy a pink arm waving a warning to hurry. From the Kelly yard, beyond the church, came the voice of Mrs. Kelly, raised in shrill commands to her brood to be off with them or it was the blue beech gad they would be getting, ivory wan of them.

Janet went to school as the bee goes to a honey blossom. Saturday and other holidays were periods of grievous separation from her companions, and just to be endured until she should meet them again. In spite of the disaster of last Saturday she was fairly dancing with joy this Monday morning; but one sight of Lennie's face quenched her spirits. There were tears in his big blue eyes. Janet could not bear to see anyone in trouble.

"What's the matter, Len?" she asked sympathetically, unheeding the frantic wavings from the pink arm far down the street. "Can't you go to school?" That was the worst thing that Janet could think of that could happen to one on a Monday morning.

Lennie shook his head. It was ever so much worse than

that. "I haven't any bugs," he faltered, "and to-morrow's the last day."

Janet looked grave. This was really serious. Before the holidays Miss Mitchell had issued commands that each one should come at the reopening of the school with a collection of not less than twelve specimens of field and garden insects. Each was to be mounted on pasteboard, and the name attached, and the collection was to be brought to the school not later than the end of the second week of September.

Janet and Nellie had had no trouble with their collections, for Bud Kelly had specimens of every living creature that hopped or crawled or flew through the whole length and breadth of the valley. He knew more about the natural history of Cherry Hill's environs than all the books on Miss Mitchell's desk, and when he set out to make a collection, the lesser inhabitants of forest and field had no place to rest the sole of their feelers.

But Lennie had always shown a gentlemanly distaste for this department of his education. He did not mind studying grasses and flowers and leaves, and when birds were the subject of their nature lessons he had taken a mild interest. To be sure he had failed to report his total number of new birds observed, because one had been a hell-diver spied down at the mill pond; and, as he confided in a whisper to Janet, he did not like to say the name of such a bird as that to Miss Mitchell. Janet did not mind saying it in the least, and had kindly offered to report the bird of evil-sound to the teacher, but Lennie chivalrously refused the sacrifice.

And now failure once more stared him in the face. He did not share any of the poet's enthusiasm for the grasshopper and the cricket. He hated running after little jumping things in the heat; he hated worse to catch them; and, most of all, he hated to hear them scrambling round in a box after they were caught.

And so here he was on the day before the very last, with but one forlorn grasshopper to his credit. Lennie was Miss Mitchell's favourite pupil, and she would be grievously disappointed.

"Miss Mitchell was at our place for tea yesterday," he confessed mournfully. "And she asked me if I'd got all my bugs, and I didn't like to tell her I hadn't only one, and I says, 'Not quite all,' I says, and now she'll find out."

Janet did her best to comfort him.

"Oh, I know what we'll do, Len! We'll ask Bud; he's sure to have ever so many, and Tim, too. Tim'll get some from Spotty Cameron. Why, Spotty's desk's just crawling with bugs!" she cried cheerfully.

Lennie shuddered. "Yes, I know it is," he admitted feelingly.

The Kellys were all waiting for them at their gate. Molly, the eldest, was a tall pale girl, with a gentle, anxious face. She wore a faded dress, much too small for her, and her shoulders were stooped from much carrying of little baby brothers.

Rosie, round-faced and jolly, just a little older than Janet; Tim and Bud, who were engaged in a wrestling match in the dust of the road; baby Cornelius, who came to the gate in his mother arms; and four-year-old Jimsey made up the lively family of six.

"Lennie hasn't any bugs yet!" cried Janet. "And to-morrow's the last bug day, and somebody's got to help him get them."

With this sympathetic preface, Lennie poured out his sad story. The little girls were very sorry, the boys listened indifferently, and baby Corny crowed in heartless derision. They all moved on schoolward, but Janet remained behind a moment to hug the baby and kiss Jimsey and give his curls a comforting pat. Jimsey was not old enough to go to school, and there were tears of rebellion in his blue eyes, as he watched his brothers and sisters go away without him.

A little farther down the street stood Dr. Gillespie's home, and there waited Nellie and her sister Kitty, both curled and starched and radiant in clean pink gingham. They, too, had to hear of Lennie's sad plight, and Kitty Gillespie, who was always kind and good, offered to bring him two

beetles she had left over to help swell his collection of one grasshopper.

Nearly every house gave its contributions to the gathering school population. Susie Beckett, a fat good-natured girl, came sauntering out of her house, her big sister Martha screaming on her to hurry or she would be late as usual. A crowd of MacKays from the store and a crowd of McDuffs from the blacksmith shop added themselves to the growing procession. And towards the corner, Sinclairs and Gibsons of all sizes and ages were approaching from four directions. For it was a saying in Cherry Hill that you couldn't throw a stone in all the length and breadth of the Valley without hitting a Gibson, and having it glance off to graze a Sinclair.

The more children that appeared, the happier and more excited Janet grew until she forgot all about Lennie and his troubles. She danced along with Nellie and Susie and Rosie, waving her bag of books, her hat hanging down her back by its string, her thin black legs and her thick brown braid seeming to change places as she leaped and capered along the dusty road.

The procession tripped gaily down the street. It hesitated before the village store window, with its alluring jars of pink candies; it lingered on the bridge where the brown creek, now shrunk to a mere thread of water, meandered across the road; it paused a moment before the open door of the blacksmith shop to view the work going on at the forge; it swept indifferently past the cottage where old Sarah Kennedy, the village dressmaker, kept her sewing-machine whirring; it stopped altogether in front of old Mrs. Murphy's untidy but interesting yard, where the hens and the geese and the pigs made sport for them on the front lawn, and where Mrs. Murphy always leaned over the rickety gate with her gay toothless smile and called out: "Aw well, now, it's the darlin's you are, an' no mistake!" and it rushed swiftly past the old Bradley Hotel where dour old Watty Sinclair sat scowling at his window, mending shoes.

Away down a little slope the laughing procession danced till it finally swept into the school yard nestled just at the foot of Cherry Hill. The school grounds were marked off by something resembling a fence, but it was a nominal boundary, only, like the equator or a meridian, merely for the purpose of calculating latitude and longitude. The whole of Sam Wright's pasture field, the "crick" that ran through it, and the patch of "bush" on the hill beyond, belonged to the pupils by an inalienable right, and they used them all for a playground.

The "crick" was their chief joy. There was a deep hole down by the willows, where the boys dived and swam in the early summer, and a wide lovely shallow where it curled round a clump of birches, which was the girls' exclusive property. Here the water ran over silver stones and golden sands, and those fortunate enough to come to school barefoot could run and splash and have the grandest fun. Indeed it was quite the most delightful place in the whole wide stretch of the Valley, and no wonder Janet felt like an exile when Saturday compelled her to stay away from school.

Miss Mitchell came to the door and rang the bell. She looked very pretty in her fresh blue cambric dress, and at the sight of her Janet forgot all about the ominous word "raucous" and loved her just as much as ever.

It was a lovely warm day, more like August than September. The school windows were open and through them came the song of insects in the grass, each little voice reminding Lennie of how brief were his harvest days. Miss Mitchell also brought the uncomfortable subject to his mind. Immediately after prayers she reminded the school of the date set for the collections to be handed in. There were still two or three who had not yet obeyed.

"There are some," she added significantly, "from whom I would have expected a more prompt response." And as she said it she looked gentle reproach towards her favourite.

Lennie hung his head, and as Janet looked across the room at him she was dismayed to see tears trickling down

onto his new plaid tie and starched white collar. She was filled with compunction. In the joy of being at school she had forgotten all about poor Lennie's troubles. She must do something to help him at once.

Looking around for possible aid her eye travelled to the rear of the school where the big boys and girls sat. There were Spotty Cameron and Tim sitting in the very back seat next to the door. Spotty's desk was always alive with insects, and the big girls were all afraid to sit near him, lest something dreadful crawl forth from his menagerie, as the snake had done on a certain day of horrible memory.

Spotty and Tim Kelly were inseparable comrades. Their tastes in insects were similar, and they loved the same sports and hated the same lessons. Janet determined that Spotty and Tim must save Lennie from disgrace.

As soon as the morning recess had sent the pupils storming out into the playground Janet made straight for Bud. She ran through the screeching crowd and caught hold of him before he was engulfed by a ball game.

"Bud, Lennie's *got* to have some bugs before to-morrow! Won't you make Spotty Cameron give him some of the nasty things he's got in his desk? Please do, Bud! Lennie says if he doesn't give them in this afternoon Miss Mitchell'll be awfully cross, and maybe she'll keep him in. Won't you, Bud?"

Bud hung his head sulkily. There was small love between the house of Caldwell and the hovel of Kelly. But it was hard for him to refuse Janet, and he had to get rid of her just now as quickly as possible; he could not have her holding him up in the middle of the school yard this way, with a ball game waiting, and all the fellows looking on ready to hoot at him for talking to a girl.

So he hastily promised anything, everything. Yes, if Lennie would come back early at noon and bring a box he would come too, and he'd get Spotty and Tim to help, only he had to get over there with the fellows right away. They were waiting for him.

Janet danced homeward at noon by Lennie's side, keeping

up his drooping spirits by the assurance that all would be well.

"Well, how goes the singing?" asked Mr. Balfour, when they were seated at the dinner table.

"Oh, I forgot all about it," cried Janet rather dismayed. "I guess I wasn't singing in my heart to-day after all."

Mr. Balfour laughed. "You certainly looked as if you were when I saw you coming home."

"Poor Lennie wasn't singing in his heart. He hasn't any bugs for the collection and Miss Mitchell said they had to be given in to-morrow. But Kitty Gillespie promised to get him some and Bud said he'd make Tim ask Spotty Cameron for some more. Spotty has boxes and boxes of beetles and everything."

Mr. Balfour's kind brown eyes beamed upon the little girl.

"You've found out the true way to make music in the world, Janet," he said. "It's by helping other people to sing just as you've been helping Lennie."

Janet looked surprised and greatly pleased. It was very nice to think she had really been making music, even though she could not go to choir practice this afternoon.

The Kelly children did not go home for dinner with any degree of regularity. Mrs. Kelly had but a hazy notion of the passing of time, and the serving of meals at regular hours was quite beyond her powers. So Tim had remained at school this afternoon, having snatched a piece of bread and pork from the breakfast table; and, further, having Spotty Cameron's generous dinner-bag to borrow from.

When the two boys had devoured their dinner, sitting on the roof of the woodshed, they went off over the fields on their usual mid-day hunt for adventure.

It was very hot for September, but there was no hope of having a swim; for the boys' pool was now only a small hole with much mud and very little water in it. The day promised to be rather dull. They took but a languid interest in Bud's suggestion that they catch something for Lennie's belated collection. Spotty had handed him out a miscel-

laneous handful of half-crushed specimens mounted on cards, but beyond that he did not intend to go.

"Let him ketch his own bugs," said Spotty, as they wandered across the pasture field towards the woods and Tim echoed heartily, "You bet!"

The hot dry stubble of the next field was alive with grasshoppers, they leaped up on either hand like drops of water when one plunged into the creek.

Spotty still had the paper bag in which he had carried his dinner to school, so, to beguile the way, he caught a couple of the leaping, dancing creatures, and thrust them into the bag, where they rattled around indignant at their imprisonment. As there was so much fun with two grasshoppers, they calculated that four would make twice as much merriment, and they proceeded to double the noise and confusion inside the bag. There was less trouble catching than avoiding them. The collection was doubled many times over, and soon the paper bag sounded like a small mill with all its machinery going at full steam, and presented a mad confusion of green and brown legs and bodies squirming and hopping and writhing in hopeless entanglement.

"Let's ketch a pail o' them an' give 'em to little Lennie for his collection!" cried Spotty. And Tim turned four hand-springs in a vain endeavour to express his appreciation.

"If we only had a coupla hornets to make the mixture good 'n' hot," Spotty added this lustre to his inspiration.

And then Tim brought his feet down to earth and added his contribution to the dream. "Let's get that wasps' nest up in Sam Wright's old sugar shanty!"

And they were off like two hounds on the scent, scattering grasshoppers in every direction.

Janet's mother never allowed her to leave home early after dinner. She believed her little girl was better playing with her dog and cat in her own garden. So when at last Janet burst from her gate to go tearing down the village street, Lennie was gone. He had hurried away early to join Bud, and neither was in sight.

When they were seated in school Janet looked eagerly at Bud. He held up his ten fingers and then two more—that meant that the twelve specimens had been found. Lennie smiled broadly, as he pointed to a big paste-board box at his feet. They were all there, he whispered to Janet, when the first class was on the floor, and the teacher was busy; he had even got half of them mounted. Bud had got most of them from Spotty, but there were half-a-dozen that were alive yet. He shuddered as he reported this disturbing fact; but Bud had promised to attend to them when they went home and his collection would be all ready for to-morrow. He further whispered the information that Kitty Gillespie had given him a wonderful green beetle, such as nobody else had, and Miss Mitchell would be simply crazy when she saw it.

Janet was so happy she could hardly give her mind to the Geography lesson on the counties that bordered Lake Ontario. She had made Lennie sing in his heart, and consequently her own heart was shouting for joy.

Meanwhile, away in the back seat where Spotty Cameron and Tim Kelly carried on their daily task of avoiding anything in the shape of lessons, dire plots were being laid.

When Lennie's class was called to the front, his big box lay revealed beneath his desk. It took very little time to transfer it to the back seat. The transference of the paper bag to the box was not quite so simple. The temperature of the bag was so high by this time, and the machinery of the mill was making such a commotion, that there was grave danger of its attracting the attention of the school. Spotty Cameron's desk was always a source of terror to those unfortunate enough to sit near it, and he knew it was not safe to make it too obtrusive. So, when the new tenants were safely housed, the box was rushed back to its original place.

When Lennie's class came back to their seats the last tragic link in the chain of ill-luck was forged. Spider Gibson, who was really Henry Gibson's Henry, sat opposite Lennie Caldwell. Spider was long and overgrown, and

always very weary; and whenever the burden of school grew too heavy, he found some relief in stretching his long legs across the aisle till his feet were under Lennie's desk.

He elongated himself this time just as Lennie was taking his seat. Spider's legs made a fence across Lennie's path. Lennie fell; and he fell right on top of his paste-board box and smashed in the lid.

The next moment there arose a shriek of pain and terror, and the moment after Lennie was running up the aisle surrounded by a cloud of raging wasps. The school became suddenly filled with noisy, jumping grasshoppers; and then came bedlam. Screaming, leaping, crying, dodging and slapping, the population of Cherry Hill school arose and followed the example of poor Lennie. But there was no relief in running; there was no escape on any side. The school was full of wasps, and if there happened to be a place where there was no wasps, there leaped a dozen grasshoppers to scare one to death.

Every moment, from newly devastated areas arose new squalls of pain and terror. The horrified teacher ran about trying to clutch a remnant of order from the chaos, but a fierce buzzing around her head turned her attention to her own safety.

The uproar grew terrifying. Everyone who was stung, and there was an alarmingly increasing number each moment, ran hither and thither shrieking and crying; and those who were not, notably Spotty Cameron and Tim Kelly, also ran and howled louder than anybody else and displayed more terror than Lennie himself.

It was almost four o'clock, so school was dismissed in a great hurry. Nobody was kept in for unlearned lessons, there was no ceremony, and no prayers except such as each was raising in his own behalf.

Janet had been stung on her arm, and Nellie right on the part in her yellow curls, and they ran home, so absorbed with their own troubles that Janet forgot to even look to see if poor Lennie had been stung to death.

Kirsty was alone in the house when the little girl burst

in. Whatever damper Kirsty might be upon one's joys, she was a real refuge in times of sorrow; and she was soon applying soda and the blue-bag, accompanied by many endearing words that were very comforting.

"Hoots, toots—there, there, the bit lassock! Eh, eh, it's gettin' easier now, isn't it, hinny?"

The stinging pain soon grew less intense under Kirsty's gentle ministrations. Janet's tears were dried and the story told. How it happened Janet had no idea. It was a dreadful mystery, but it seemed as if Lennie's collection of insects had unmounted itself and attacked the whole school. There was no other explanation.

Kirsty condemned with indiscriminate severity everyone connected with the affair. Miss Mitchell came in for the deepest censure. "It's jist what ah'd expect! Why doesn't she learn the bairns to read and spell and do their sums instead of spendin' their time at a lot o' silly worms. Collectin' insects indeed! As if there wasn't enough such abominations on the earth without folk runnin' after them! Havin' the school crawlin' with vermin! The scholars can think o' plenty o' bad things to do without their teacher puttin' more into their heads!"

When Janet had been further solaced with a couple of cookies, and was feeling quite herself again; and had begun to wonder how poor Lennie and Bud had fared, Kirsty took the opportunity to admonish her regarding her foolish habit of running hither and skither, here-away, there-away, getting into mischief.

"But it was right in school when I was working my fractions that I got stung, Kirsty," argued Janet reasonably, and Kirsty bade her run away to her sums and not answer back.

Mr. Balfour had been away all day visiting the people of his congregation who lived away down the valley near Lake Simcoe, a very respectable region which went by the rather sinister name of "Down Below." So it was not until evening that Janet had a chance to tell him of the day's disaster.

The warm September day had ended in a glorious sunset

and she was sitting on the steps of the back porch studying her spelling. When Mr. Balfour had put the little car into the shed, he came and sat on the steps beside her and heard the tale of her unsuccessful attempt at making music.

Mr. Balfour had no light to shed on the mystery of the wasps; though he shook his head wisely and looked as if he knew a great deal more than he confessed.

"I tried to make Lennie sing in his heart, but I made nearly everybody in school cry instead," Janet concluded rather dejectedly.

"Never mind," he said cheerfully, "you tried, that's the chief point. You see music isn't learned easily, and when people are practising they often make discords."

Janet smiled, much comforted. Mr. Balfour was really a very wonderful sort of Tasty Bit. She felt that he ought to have a shelf all to himself. The glory of the sky was fading to a delicate green and gold above the hills where one silver star shone faintly. Nearer the darkening earth the red of the sunset still shone through the orchard aisles. The black trunks of the trees stood out against the radiance.

"What a beautiful world we live in, Janet," he said softly. "It should be all music, shouldn't it?"

"Yes, if it weren't for wasps and things," sighed Janet. "And if everybody's ears were all right so they could sing. It's getting dark," she whispered after a moment's silent contemplation of the beauty of the evening. "What is the dark, Mr. Balfour?"

"I suppose it's a big blanket that God spreads over the earth when it is time for it to go to sleep."

"And those trees look like big black pins stuck in the blanket to hold it down, don't they?" she added.

"The day Thou gavest, Lord, is ended,
The darkness falls at Thy behest,"

sang Mr. Balfour softly.

"I wish I could sing it like that," sighed Janet, when he had ended. "I don't mean down in my stomach, I mean out loud the way you do. But I don't suppose I'll ever be able

to, unless tunes go out of fashion. Maybe they will some day," she added, brightening. "Don't you think I would have been a good singer if I'd lived before tunes were invented, Mr. Balfour?"

"Indeed, I'm sure you would," he answered heartily. "But you're a good singer right now, remember the Magnificat. Why, you've been trying to make melody all day that's heard in heaven. I shouldn't be surprised if the angels call you Janet Melody."

CHAPTER VIII

A MAKER OF MUSIC

IT was a lovely practice, wasn't it?" said Janet, with a tremendous effort.

It was Saturday morning, and the last practice for the anniversary was over. Mr. Balfour had come in and stood a few minutes at the door listening to the last chorus. It was over and Janet and he were walking across the lawn towards home, she taking great strides to keep step with him.

"Did you see where Nellie stood? That used to be my place."

"But I saw you singing, all the same, Jenny Melody," he said.

"Me?" she asked, puzzled.

"Yes, I saw by the way you held up your head that you were singing in your heart and singing better than anyone in the choir."

She looked up at him with one of her adoring smiles and almost lost her balance.

"I guess I wasn't singing very hard," she admitted. "I was wanting so much to be up there singing with Nellie. I wonder if I'll ever be able to sing? That man," Janet always referred to the organist who had ended her musical career as "That Man," "that man said my ears would develop some day, but I look at them in the glass every morning and I don't see any difference. Do you think my ears are any longer than they were when you came here, Mr. Balfour?"

He did not laugh as so many grown-up people did at Janet's queer questions. He looked down very kindly at

her pink ears peeping from the tangled masses of her heavy hair. "They're just the right length," he said gravely. "I wouldn't worry any more about them. I think heart music is much better anyway."

Dinner was ready and they sat down opposite each other and considered what would be the best way to make melody all afternoon. Mrs. Meldrum had gone away for the day. The Women's Institute of West Hampton, a town some miles east, had asked her to address them that afternoon. Kirsty was especially busy, for she had a campaign of preserving fruit on her programme, as well as her Saturday's cleaning. Plainly, this was going to be a difficult day for Janet.

"You see," he said as he carved Kirsty's roast, which was done exactly right, "no one can really sing in her heart unless she makes some one else happy. So you look out for someone this afternoon."

"There isn't anybody but you and Pepper and Blackie and Kirsty; and you're too busy, and Pepper and Blackie are happy already, and Kirsty says I drive her clean daft when I try to help her."

This was not very encouraging.

"I think you might find some way of helping Kirsty without worrying her," he suggested gently. "She seems to have a very great deal of work to do to-day, and I feel sure she would like to have a bright, smart, little girl to help her."

And then he went away upstairs, and took down the flag and closed the study door, feeling as if he ought to be arrested for cruelty to children; and wishing that Mrs. Meldrum was not quite so popular with the outside world, when there was a little living electric battery at home, charged to the danger point.

Janet nobly did her part. She went to the kitchen in search of employment. Here she found Kirsty making plum jam for the Stand Bys.

Kirsty despised all recipes and cook-books, and all the poor helpless trollops who depended upon such things. She particularly held in disdain the meetings of the Women's

Institute in which Mrs. Meldrum was so interested, and heard with derision of women coming out from town to give talks on this or that branch of housekeeping. Kirsty never took advice from anyone on cooking, never followed a rule or precept, and never made a mistake.

But just because she was so efficient she was not a very comfortable person to assist. Janet knew that Kirsty did not approve of her presence in the kitchen, and she opened the door a very small way and humbly offered her services.

"Huts, why can ye no go an' set down on a chair an' learn yer lesson?" she complained. "Here then," she added grudgingly. "ye can take the stanes out o' them plums."

She tied a huge apron around Janet's neck so that it covered even her feet. "Set out yonder," she added, indicating the back porch.

Janet installed herself on the porch bench with a big basket of plums before her and a large bowl on her knee. Kirsty went back to the kitchen and she was left alone with her dog and cat, and the lovely sun-bathed view of field and valley and hill that stretched out far beyond the orchard trees.

Janet soon discovered that the stoning of plums was a wearisome task. She could have done it literally, with much zest, before the toilsome basket was finished. Her fingers grew sore, her back ached, her hair got in the way, and plum juice streamed over her.

She beguiled the heavy moments by sending a stream of questions through the screen door that opened into the kitchen; questions that were in no way calculated to help keep Kirsty cool in the combined high temperatures of the kitchen stove and a hot temper.

"Kirsty," Janet called for the third time. "Kirsty, why do you suppose every plum has to have a stone in it?"

"It's the Almighty that's put them there," declared Kirsty, shoving a stick of wood into the stove with unnecessary energy. "An' poor sinful bein's has no right to be complainin' against His ways."

Janet squeezed the heart out of a blue sphere, thereby

squirting a little fountain of juice right into Pepper's face, and creating a very hilarious diversion. When he was quieted again, Janet took up her side of the argument once more.

"But I don't see the use of putting a stone into every one, Kirsty," she called. "They'd be so much better without."

"And where would ye be gettin' new plum trees, I'd like to know? The stones are the seeds and they make the new trees."

But Janet did not easily give up the struggle against existing evils.

"Well," she declared, "I think it was a foolish way to manage things, then. There's billions and trillions of plums on our trees, and we'd never want that many new trees. There wouldn't be room in all the valley if we planted them all; and Lennie's father has more than we have. Why couldn't there be just one plum on every tree with a stone in it? That would be plenty."

Here the plum jam elected to boil over, and Kirsty did not take time to rebuke this irreverent and rebellious spirit; while Pepper, having rather enjoyed his encounter with the plum juice, came dancing along on his hind legs, coaxing Janet to repeat the joke. She very willingly accepted the invitation, and from this moment the stoning of the plums proved a very pleasant function.

When the jam had subsided to a proper simmer Kirsty came out to investigate the cause of the loud and untimely merriment. A dreadful sight met her. From head to foot Janet was dripping plum juice. Even her hair and shoes were besmeared. The porch floor was swimming, and Blackie had retired in disgust to a dry perch away at the other end; while a purple-spotted dog disported himself in the midst of the mess, to the accompaniment of Janet's shrieks of laughter.

"Oh, eh, preserve us!" cried Kirsty in horror. And certainly Janet looked quite ready to preserve, resembling a huge plum much more than a human child.

Kirsty caught her up by the back of her apron and shook her.

"Oot o' this!" she cried. "I knew there'd be no good come o' you an' yon pup meddlin'!"

She drove Pepper off the porch, and shoved Janet inside, declaring that it would take her longer to clean up after her than to stone all the plums in the Manse orchard.

Thus banished, the mistaken maker of music went slowly upstairs to her room. She washed her hands and face, leaving purple marks on the towel, and then looked about her. She had been a failure again. She had only brought trouble to Kirsty. She could not work, she could not go out and play with Bud, and still the long dreary length of Saturday afternoon stretched ahead of her.

She wandered along the hall to find that the study door was shut and no welcome flag was displayed. She balanced herself, face downward, on the bannister and slowly slid to the bottom, her head and her long braid hanging perilously far over. Pepper was waiting on the front veranda wagging his tail, and looking at her enquiringly, wondering, in his kind doggish mind, just what was the matter.

Janet stepped out to join him, and there on the veranda table lay the Saturday towel which had not yet got itself hemmed. Janet suddenly remembered that her mother said she was to finish it. She took it up as if it had been hung with weights and sank heavily into her little chair.

"I feel as if I'd get sick and have to go to bed if I sew you," she groaned, addressing the piece of unfinished sewing. She laid it on her lap and looked about her for some means of escape.

Across the street the Caldwell garden glowed in the sunshine, but Lennie was no where to be seen. He had gone to town with his parents that morning. Her own garden smiled at her invitingly. The September grass was as green as it had been in June. The yellowing elms along the lawn, the scarlet salvia, the asters and the hollyhocks, nodded at her invitingly. Down the shady aisles of the orchard a conical pile of rosy apples gleamed forth; the

hens and chickens in their little enclosure were singing and chatting happily. It was a delightful, languorous, lazy September day.

But Janet was neither languorous nor lazy. The silence and peace of the garden made no appeal to her, for Bud was away over the hills hunting beech nuts, and Nellie and Kitty were playing ball in their yard far down the street. How could anyone make music when there was no audience that wanted to hear it?

She flung the towel around her shoulders for a shawl, and catching up Pepper, began rocking him and singing a loud, discordant lullaby.

Pepper did not mind the noise, but he hated to be used as a doll. He squirmed free, and leaped to the veranda floor. Then he looked towards the street and gave a sharp bark. Janet jumped from her chair and went down the garden path with joyous leaps. Her Sunday School teacher had paused at the gate!

"Oh, Miss Lena, oh, Miss Lena! You're coming in, aren't you? Do please come in and see me and Mr. Balfour." Janet clutched her hand in both hers. "Mother's away and I can't go anywhere, and I want to go away and sing to someone and Mother isn't here for me even to ask her."

"To sing to someone?" asked Lena, puzzled.

"Oh, not to sing out loud, just to make them feel happy, and to sing and make melody in my heart to the Lord, the way Mr. Balfour told me. I tried Kirsty, but it didn't work."

Miss Lena Sinclair sat down on the veranda seat, and looked very much interested. That was just like Miss Lena, she was always ready to drop her own affairs to listen to other people's troubles; and no wonder Janet was convinced that she was the kindest and best and most beautiful teacher that ever blessed a Sunday School class. Unfortunately, though Lena Sinclair was a very amiable young lady indeed she was not at all as beautiful as Janet believed. She was a tall girl, slow of movement, with a pale unattractive face, except for a pair of fine dark eyes. She was

always well dressed for her father was one of the wealthiest farmers in that district of wealthy farmers. She had been away at school, too, and had studied music in Algonquin, the neighbouring town, but she had come home this summer to allow her younger sister to leave for school. She intended to go away again when the heavy summer work of the farm was over, but the gossips all very kindly pointed out to each other that it wasn't likely Lena would be in a hurry; now that there was a fine looking young minister in the church.

"Tell me all about this new way of making music," she said kindly. Of course she had heard about the silent singing from Janet at Sunday School, but she had not known that it included making other people sing.

"Yes, that's what Mr. Balfour says," Janet declared, rocking violently in her little chair. "He says that if you're really making music in your heart to the Lord, you'll make other people happy. But I don't seem to be able to do it myself. I tried it on Lennie and he got into a wasp's nest right in school; and to-day I've been trying to make music for Kirsty, and I just made an awful muss on the back porch instead; and now I can't do anything but sit here all day long and hem a towel. Oh, Miss Lena, did your mother make you hem towels when you were a little girl? Don't you think towels would do just as well without a hem? I think fringe is prettier. But I wish I could go out and find somebody and make them sing!"

"If your mother wouldn't mind why couldn't you come with me? I'm going to make some visits, and you would be sure to find somebody who needed to be cheered up."

Janet fairly groaned aloud. "Oh, but Mother's away, and I can't ask her!"

"Well—suppose——" her teacher looked away through the trees down the white road. "Can't you ask anyone else?"

"I'm afraid it wouldn't be any use to ask Kirsty," said Janet mournfully. "She doesn't like me to go stravogin'—that's going down into the village on Saturdays, or over

into the field with Bud. Oh, Miss Lena!" she jumped from her seat, "do you think it would be all right if I asked Mr. Balfour?"

"Why, I should think so. I think I'd try and see, anyway."

"But there's no flag on his door, and he's writing his sermon; and I promised on my word and honour that I'd never, never knock on the study door when the flag wasn't out; only unless the house was on fire, but I couldn't set fire to the house, even to get away with you!" she ended with a great sigh of renunciation.

"What do you do when a caller comes to see him?" asked Miss Lena, thinking Janet seemed rather slow for such a clever child.

"Oh, I have to go and tell him then, but there's no caller now." And then light dawned upon Janet at last, and she jumped out of her chair again.

"Oh, Miss Lena, you be a caller, will you?"

Miss Lena, after some coaxing, consented; and Janet went up the stairs like a storm of wind, and knocked on the study door.

In response to a "Come in," she stood on the threshold, her eyes so brilliant, her face so joyful, that Hugh Balfour stared at her.

"Please, Mr. Balfour," she said, her breath coming in gasps, "there's a lady downstairs to see you,—a caller."

As he went down the stairs, Janet leaping along at his side, she confessed quite frankly, all about the little subterfuge.

"You see I wanted to ask you if you'd let me go out with Miss Lena; and I'd promised I wouldn't rap on the door unless the flag was out, or there was a caller; so we just pretended that Miss Lena was a caller. She isn't really one, you know; because there's nobody here to call on when Mother's away; but I thought you wouldn't mind if I got you to come down! And, please, Mr. Balfour, do you think Mother would mind if I went down to Nellie's

with Miss Lena; 'cause then I might find somebody that was unhappy like you said. Do you think I could go?"

Mr. Balfour went smiling down to the veranda. He found Miss Lena very pleasant and agreeable; and when it was settled that Janet might go, they sat and had a very pleasant little chat while she went storming upstairs to get her hat.

When she returned and the two had gone away together, the young man stood at the open door, and watched them go down the flower-bordered walk, the tall figure in the pretty blue suit, and the leaping, dancing, little one in the short plaid skirt, and the little, black packet. He went back to his task and worked all the better for the pleasant little interruption.

Meanwhile Janet went skipping along by her teacher's side; her tongue keeping pace with her dancing feet. Didn't Miss Lena think Mr. Balfour was the best and kindest and loveliest minister in the whole wide world, except Father? Janet was sure of it; and she beguiled the way by tales of all the wonderful things he did and all about the flag and the good times they had together; and how he called her Miss Melody or Jenny Melody; how she was afraid he did not love Blackie with his very whole heart, though he had admitted that he loved him some; but he loved Pepper very, very much indeed; and he had a dog at home named Towser; and he had a sister whose name was Maud; and she had a lovely baby, and he had its picture, etc., etc. It was a tale of endless adulation; but Miss Lena did not seem to tire of it; but listened as though she was really interested.

The first visit was exactly to Janet's liking, for it took Miss Lena to see her friend Marjorie Gillespie, who was Nellie's big sister. Nellie's father was the village doctor. He was mounting into his battered and dusty car as they stopped at the gate. He was in a hurry, and when Doctor Gillespie was pushed for time he was very cross, and announced the fact to the whole countryside.

"Good day, Lena," he said shortly, in answer to their

greeting. "Good day, Janet, good day! Yes, it's fine, but we'll have rain soon. This can't last in September. Go on in. You'll find the girls sitting round, wasting their time, as usual. It's great to have nothing to do but dress up and sit on a veranda all day. The Almighty take pity on the man that gets a wife these days! He'll have to be a millionaire several times over, and then his wife'll be wanting something he can't afford!"

He drove away, his rattly little car striving with him to see which would make the more noise.

"Father's been scolding for an hour because I asked him for a new dress; and Isabel asked for more money for school," said Miss Marjorie Gillespie, a fair, pretty girl of eighteen, coming out on the veranda to meet the visitors. "I'm going to leave home and earn my own living; I've decided on that. I'm going this month, for sure."

As Marjorie Gillespie was always about to leave home on account of her father's bursts of temper, her friend was not disturbed over the announcement. The wire door swung open and the mother, a large, placid, handsome woman, came out on the veranda. Mrs. Gillespie minded her husband's outbursts no more than a beautiful mountain minds the thunder.

"Why, Lena," she exclaimed. "Come away and sit down. How is your mother's rheumatism?"

Nellie came bounding round the corner of the house, and the two little girls, their arms about each other, skipped away to the magic palace of dolls and dolls' furniture: Nellie's playhouse in the back yard.

The visit was all too short; Janet was called away before they had examined half the new treasury of broken dishes that Nellie had collected.

"Sylvia may be home next week," Miss Lena was saying, as they paused at the pretty gate in the cedar hedge. "She's coming out to see Grandmother."

"Sylvia! Won't that be grand. Let's get her to sing at the anniversary. I suppose she sings better than ever."

"Yes, I think she does." Miss Lena's voice was not

enthusiastic; her rather sad face had grown sadder. "I'll write and ask her if you like, Marjorie. I know she'll sing if she comes, but you know how it is with Sylvie," she added with a half-apologetic laugh, "she may change her mind at the last minute."

"Oh," cried Janet, "I hope she comes. Nellie and I intended to be great singers like her, didn't we, Nell? But now I can't, 'cause there's something wrong with my ears."

They all laughed at this; and though Janet still felt the matter to be a tragedy, she laughed too. She went dancing away down the street with Miss Lena, dodging from one side to the other in a game of "See-your-face-last" with Nellie. When she had finally taken her leave, Janet remembered her errand of mercy. The Gillespies were such a jolly family, even the doctor, when he was not in a temper, that one could not think of the sad side of life in their presence. Janet felt she had failed to justify her journey from home. She had not brought music into anyone's life.

"We have still two places to visit," Miss Lena explained, "and there will likely be a chance of finding someone unhappy." There's old Mrs. Kennedy now; perhaps she needs a little girl to cheer her up."

Farther down the village street stood a neat little white cottage with a neat little garden before it. The path to the front door and all the flower beds were bordered with white-washed stones, and the whole place had the appearance of having been newly washed, starched and ironed. Here lived Miss Sarah Kennedy, the village dressmaker, with her invalid mother. Miss Sarah was a tall, sallow, melancholy looking woman, whose whole life seemed to be as drab as her appearance. But appearances were entirely misleading here as in many other cases. A great self-esteem had compensated Miss Sarah for the loss of many other things that make life pleasant, and she lived in the comfortable conviction that her home, her talents, her mother and herself were the envy of all about her.

At the sound of a rap on the door she came out to the

little porch, her mouth full of pins, a piece of sewing across her arm.

"Something for Sylvia, eh?" she asked when Lena had stated her errand. "Well, well, so she's comin' home at last?"

"Just for a few days here, and a few days down at Grandma's. Sylvia never stays long now."

"Too many big doin's in the town, I guess. She'll be thinkin' she's a great lady with all her music-lessons. Well, no matter where she goes, she always comes to me for a dress when she's home, I notice."

"Sylvie always says she would rather get a dress from you than any Toronto dressmaker," said Lena Sinclair kindly.

Miss Sarah gave a cackling laugh. "She's right. I don't think much o' the stuff some o' them city trollops turns out. But as I often say to Ma, you've got to be born a dressmaker to do it right. I guess I was born one; and I oughtn't to take any credit to myself, eh, Ma?"

"Who's talkin' out there, Sarah?" cried a querulous old voice from the room behind. "I hear somebody talkin'. You never tell me who comes to the house!"

Miss Sarah, listening to the directions for Sylvia Ward's dress, paid no attention. Her eyes shone as her fingers caressed the beautiful rose silk; she was smiling radiantly as they turned away.

As they passed out through the little gate in the hedge of bright asters, Lena Sinclair gave a slight shiver.

"What's the matter?" asked Janet; "are you cold, Miss Lena?"

She smiled. "I was looking into my future, Janet. I've just had my fortune read; and it didn't please me."

"Your fortune? What does that mean? Where did you read it?" asked Janet, all curiosity.

Miss Lena put her off with the smile that Mother used when she had something she did not want to tell. Janet understood, and did not ask any more questions. But she wondered.

"Miss Kennedy sings in her heart, doesn't she?" she remarked sagely. "But I'm afraid Granny Kennedy doesn't. I wonder what would make her happy. If I took Pepper down to see her, or Bud's duck, he's awfully funny; I wonder if it would cheer her up; do you think it would, Miss Lena?"

Miss Lena was not sure. "Perhaps if you took the poor old lady a magazine to read or some of Kirsty's nice jelly, that would be better. Sarah might not like Tommy in her clean house." They were passing the house next to the dressmaker's, and the lady who lived in it was leaning over the front gate to catch any possible passer-by who might talk to her. There was no need to bring cheer to this place. Mrs. Murphy was sociably inclined and given to much talk and laughter over either the front gate or the back fence.

Since their son Patsy had made "good money" in the city, and provided liberally for his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Murphy belonged to the idle rich; except for some spasmodic housekeeping on the part of the lady, and an occasional day's work with the farmers on the part of her husband. Patsy had build his parents a neat, red-brick house, with a wide veranda; and had laid out a lawn in front. But some of the front window-panes were broken and stuffed with old newspapers and a bed-quilt; and the veranda was used as a sort of store-house for all the miscellaneous articles that the house would not conveniently hold. And the pig had long ago rooted up the lawn; and the geese had turned it into a promenade.

Mrs. Murphy was wrinkled and brown and incredibly thin; and looked as if all the storms of life had beaten against her. She wore a wisp of a shawl over her bony shoulders, summer and winter, and her sleeves were always rolled up to her sharp elbows, as though she were just in the midst of a day's cleaning, which was very far from the truth. Her front teeth were gone; and as she was given to much loud laughter, her claw-like hand was always shoot-

ing out from underneath the shawl to cover up her gaping smile, generally a moment too late.

"Aw, good day, now, Lena," she said in her ingratiating tones. "And there's little Jinit, the darlin'. And how's your Pa, the pore body? And would you all be well, Lena? And how's the pore old body foreninst?"

"I'm just going over to see Uncle Watty now, Mrs. Murphy," answered the girl. "And how are you and Mr. Murphy? And so Patsy's married and you've got a daughter-in-law." Mrs. Murphy winked one bead-like eye solemnly.

"Aw, yis, I have that; but don't be blamin' me, now." She lowered her voice and leaned over the gate. "Sure and it's the stylish piece she is. Pore Patsy, he'll find her the handful, and that's no lie. Sure, me an' Mike we wint into town to see them; and didn't we mate her comin' down the strate, walkin' like the turkey-gobbler when he's mad." Mrs. Murphy turned and went up and down the little path, carrying herself with great hauteur, her bony claw holding up her ragged skirt very high. She looked so funny that Janet squealed with laughter; and seeing she was appreciated, the old lady went on. "Aw, you should see the twist to the tail av her, whin she thinks annybody's lookin'!" She winked again, burst into loud laughter, and gave Lena Sinclair a poke with her long lean finger. "And who was she? Sure she comes of that Shannon tribe. Her father's owld Tim Shannon, an' his father before him uste kape the owld Shannon Hotel Down Below. An' they were all that mane they would stale from the Holy Vargin," and she went off into a loud cackle. Lena Sinclair, mindful of Janet, turned to go.

"We must hurry, Mrs. Murphy," she said. "I'll be late for milking. Come, Janet."

Janet left reluctantly. She had never had a chance to cultivate Mrs. Murphy's acquaintance before; though she passed her place every day going to school, and exchanged good-mornings. She thought her delightful, and would willingly have lingered. But Miss Lena hurried her away,

fearful that Mrs. Meldrum might have a rebuke for her when Janet repeated the conversation, as Janet had such an uncomfortable habit of doing.

Janet lost no time. "Isn't she a funny old lady, Miss Lena? I like her, don't you? Who is the lady she doesn't like, that's got the twist to her tail? And what does she mean by the Holy Vargin?"

"Mrs. Murphy is very kind and neighbourly, Janet," said Miss Lena hurriedly. "But sometimes she says things that it isn't wise to repeat. But we must hurry and see Uncle Watty. Mother sent me down with some jam for him. Perhaps he will let us in to-day."

They crossed the road to the old tumble-down building that stood on the corner. The old Bradley House was the one antique that Cherry Hill boasted; and, with the exception of the Kellys' and the Murphys' homes, the only patch of desert in its fair gardens. It was an old hotel, a remnant of the days of the old stage with its stopping places. Its long veranda, which had sheltered many a traveller, sagged forward, and the roof hung downward like a frowning brow, as though the ancient house remembered sullenly the ugly traffic it has carried on. For a bad name the Bradley House had had; and now it was like a broken old man sitting in poverty, remembering his sins. The windows were almost all smashed long ago, and the garden at the back was a tangle of blackened fruit trees, and sturdy burdocks, with here and there a bunch of ragged-robin or money-musk struggling for life. The old bar-room was still intact, inasmuch as it did not leak; and here all alone lived Old Watty Sinclair.

The Sinclairs were a highly respected, wealthy family. There was a large connection of them living about Cherry Hill, and Uncle Watty was the only blot on their escutcheon. He belonged to the parent stem of the family who lived away down the Valley road towards Lake Simcoe, the region known as "Down Below." He owned part of one of the best farms in the county and had dwelt in a very fine house with his married brother and his nephew; and had

very little to do and plenty to live on. And yet, he had left it all and come to live in the one dry room of the Bradley House, to eke out a poverty stricken existence cobbling shoes. He lived in ostentatious poverty; he walked the twelve miles to town, while his nephew's fine cars stormed past him; he wore the oldest and most ragged clothes; and in every way possible flaunted his extreme indigence in the eyes of the world and his scandalised relatives.

There was a reason for Old Watty's conduct. It was pure contrariness, the younger members all said; but Old Watty kept his counsel and mended the village shoes in stubborn independence.

The school children had a half-superstitious fear of the Old Bradley House and its lonely inmate. But as he was a relative of Miss Lena's, Janet felt it was safe to go in. Besides, she had a devouring curiosity to see past the old window where he sat.

Lena Sinclair's father was one of the prosperous brothers against whom Old Watty had revolted. She was the only relative who visited him; and he took a great pride in showing her how poor he was. She tapped on the door, and the old man looked up from the paper he was reading with a quick glance from under his bristling eyebrows. He opened the door a meagre foot. By peeping around Miss Lena's skirt, Janet could see a bare high room, with an old bed in the corner, and a rusty stove and a table near it.

"How are you to-day, Uncle Watty?" asked the girl kindly.

"How am I to-day?" repeated the old man in a high cracked voice. "I'm just the same as I was the last time ye were down askin' after me!"

"Would you like this little jar of peach jam? Mother thought——"

"Ye needn't be worryin' about bringin' me fol-de-rols," he interrupted. "I'm not starving. The cook in this hotel

makes everythin' jist to my taste. I don't get cold potatoes nor anything too tony to eat."

And he closed the door in their faces, and went back to his newspaper.

Miss Lena flushed as she put the little jar back into her bag and turned to go. Janet looked up at her with big enquiring eyes.

"Doesn't he like peach jam?" she asked, amazed. "And has he got somebody to cook for him in there, Miss Lena? I thought he lived all alone."

"So he does. It's just Uncle Watty's queer way of talking. He was angry at Aunt Jennie because she gave him potato salad, once; and that's one of the reasons he left home."

"I guess he doesn't sing in his heart, does he?"

"No, I'm afraid not; and he's getting old and the winters are very hard on him,—poor Uncle Watty."

"Nellie likes him. He comes there every Monday for the 'Globe'; and he reads it all through."

"Yes; but now he's getting so lame with the rheumatism from living in that old damp house that he can hardly walk out for the paper."

"And won't he let anyone go and visit him?"

"Not any of his relations."

Janet was skipping along by her teacher's side; and suddenly took a higher leap than ever.

"I know what I could do!" she cried. "Nellie and I could take the paper to him on Monday mornings when we go to school, couldn't we? Mother wouldn't mind. That would be helping him to sing and make melody in his heart to the Lord, wouldn't it, Miss Lena?"

She was so enthusiastic that Miss Lena had not the heart to dampen her ardour; and said rather weakly that it would be very kind of the little girls. But she had very little hope that they would be well received, even with his favourite newspaper, the "Globe," in their hands; for no one had crossed the threshold of the old Bradley House since

Old Watty had come there to make his voluntary exile five years before.

But Janet went dancing home, delighted. The aroma of Kirsty's spiced plums came stealing through the hall: and there was her mother's travelling bag at the head of the stair! She went running up, calling to her.

"Oh, Mother," she cried after the first rapturous greetings were over. "I think you must have been away for years and years!" She curled round the bed post watching her mother smooth back the beautiful waves of her white hair, and arrange the lace at her throat. "I think you look so pretty, Mother, I just love to look at you," she declared, regarding her with loving admiration.

Her mother smiled, well pleased. She knew the value of a child's spontaneous compliment

"And what did you and Miss Lena do when you went for your walk?"

Janet plunged into the recital, anxious to tell it all in one breath.

"Softly, darling, just a little slower. Well, well, it would really be very nice for you and Nellie to take the poor old man his paper, provided you didn't go in. And it was very kind of Miss Lena to take you with her. Did she stay long here? Did Mr. Balfour come down and talk to her?"

Janet told the whole story in exact detail and her mother smiled. Mrs. Meldrum, in her efficient way, had a great desire to take all the people of her world and arrange them as she saw they ought to be arranged; and as Hugh Balfour was her oldest friend's son, and she had a sincere affection for him, she felt it was her duty to guide the young man carefully in his possible choice of a wife. She saw very pleasant possibilities ahead.

CHAPTER IX

THE ANNIVERSARY

BUT, Janet," her mother looked at her in uncomprehending dismay, "you surely wouldn't like to be seen at tea-meeting in that old school dress; and Nellie and Susie and all the other little girls in white!"

It was the great day of the anniversary supper, and Janet had hurried home from school to prepare for it. As she was not to sing in the choir, she felt she might surely have the compensation of appearing in a plain dark dress, that did not need to be watched and guarded.

So it was something of a shock to find when she went upstairs, that her mother had laid out on the bed her white dress and blue silk sash.

"But I'm not going to be in the choir anyway," she argued. "And,—you said it was nice to be dressed different from other people." Janet sometimes had an inconveniently retentive memory.

"I didn't mean for little girls," declared her mother, wondering uncomfortably whether she was contradicting herself. "Really, Janet, you should not argue with Mother this way over your clothes. It's very naughty."

Janet looked guilty. She stood on one foot and fitted the other into the pattern in the carpet.

"I—I don't intend to be naughty, Mother," she explained patiently. "But often you don't know whether to let me do something or not, and when I argue with you about it, it helps you make up your mind, doesn't it?"

"Well, I don't need you to help me make up my mind now; so run away at once and wash your face and hands and put on the white dress."

Janet obeyed sadly; and a half-hour later, very proper and uncomfortable in her dainty array, she walked by Lennie's side over to the church.

But it was impossible to be conscious of one's clothes before the wonderful vision of the church. The young ladies of the congregation had worked all afternoon and transformed it into an autumnal garden. They had hung the pulpit and choir gallery with scarlet vines, and filled the windows with all the more beautiful trophies of field and garden. From banks of feathery asparagus peeped golden pumpkins, and purple cabbage. Sheaves of wheat, and stalks of corn, alternated with bunches of crimson dahlias and purple asters.

The long tables set out in the basement were decorated with scarlet berries and trailing vines; and already waiters were hurrying to and fro with plates of cake and pie. People were crowding up into the church to leave their wraps, and then descending the narrow stairs to where the supper was laid.

Janet found her friends immediately, Nellie, and Rosie, and Susie, and Molly, and they all rushed to seats at what appeared to be the most heavily laden table. And to Janet's delight Bud and Tim came and sat right opposite, and Lennie was only a little way removed, sitting between his mother and his aunt.

When the tables were all filled Mr. Balfour stood at the head of the longest, and called upon them all to stand and sing "Be Present at Our Table, Lord." Everyone rose and burst into song; and Janet had to clap her hands over her mouth to hold back the words that rushed to her lips. And for a few minutes she had to try very hard to remember that she was really singing in her heart and thanking the Lord for the food He had given.

The moment they were seated, there arose a great clatter of dishes and voices and hurrying footsteps, and a strong aroma of boiling coffee.

The Sunday School teachers waited upon the tables, and to Janet's great delight Miss Lena was near her place.

Martha Beckett was there, too, declaring over and over that it was a caution what those boys could eat; and it was worse than having the threshing and a barn-raising all on one day.

But Miss Lena smiled and let the boys make all the noise they liked, and kept piling the plates with still more pie and cake and tarts and cookies.

When they had all eaten so much that even a fresh lemon pie provoked but a languid interest in the faces of the Kelly boys; and Janet was looking about to catch a glimpse of her mother and Mr. Balfour, she heard Miss Lena exclaim joyfully:

"Oh, here's Sylvia! I was afraid she wasn't coming."

Janet turned; a strange young lady in a beautiful white dress and a long, grey, fur-trimmed cloak was standing behind her. She had such bright dancing eyes, such a soft pile of bronze-gold hair and such a sweet rose-leaf face, that Janet stared at her in frank admiration. She was surely the loveliest lady she had ever set eyes on.

Then Marjorie Gillespie and Martha Beckett and Miss Mitchell hurried up to her; and there was a great deal of delighted talk and laughter; and Miss Lena led her away to a table at the other end of the room.

"Oh, that's Sylvia Ward, isn't it, Nellie?" cried Janet, suddenly remembering the young lady who sang so beautifully. "Oh, my! I suppose it's no use thinking I'll ever be like her, because I'm a Silent Singer. And no matter how much you sing in your heart to the Lord you can never make it sound as lovely as her singing does."

Nellie was staring after the newcomer so absorbed in her beautiful dress that she did not offer her usual comfort. The little girls were not the only ones who gazed at her. Sylvia Ward did not often come back to Cherry Hill. Once a year she generally put in an appearance at the old church, and sang with ever-increasing sweetness; but her visits grew shorter each time. Yet she was really a native of the village, and had divided her childhood days between the home of her cousin, Lena Sinclair, and her

grandmother's place, the old Sinclair homestead "Down Below." Sylvia was an orphan, and since she had grown up she had lived with her father's brother in Algonquin, the neighbouring town. Her uncle was proud of her beauty and her clear silvery voice, and was spending all he could afford upon her education.

So whenever she appeared in Cherry Hill with the Sinclairs, the sight of her raised envy and admiration in every young heart. The envy was perhaps uppermost on this evening as she moved through the crowds with her cousins; it seemed to all the girls who had gone to school with Sylvia in the old days that fortune had been quite too partial.

As soon as the supper was finished everyone went up to the church for the programme. The little choir ranged themselves in rows on the platform for the opening chorus, and Janet felt a pang of regret as they burst into the familiar words:

"We are scholars in the Sabbath School,
Met in An-ni-ver-sa-ree!"

Mr. Balfour was the chairman and from his seat on the platform he looked down at Janet and smiled at her in a way that said quite plainly that she was singing just as well as they were, and his smile brought much comfort. And when she pranced up to the platform to take part in a dialogue, he whispered as she passed him, "I almost *heard* you singing in that last chorus, Jenny Melody."

Then she had her recitation to say, and that brought her up beside him once more. "Little Orphan Annie" was the piece, and she raced through it, not stopping once to draw breath. When she had uttered the last "If you don't watch out!" all as if it were one word, she was looking so anxiously at Mr. Balfour to see what he thought of her performance, that she quite forgot her bow, and ran right to the edge of the platform before she remembered it. Then she ran back, and made such a deep one that her long braid fell over her face. She did not mind in

the least that everybody laughed, and she was greatly delighted to see that Mr. Balfour clapped his hands as hard as Bud did; keeping up a duet with him long after everyone had stopped.

When the programme was half finished Mr. Balfour announced that there would be a solo by Miss Sylvia Ward; and the audience broke into tremendous applause. For though there was much envy of Sylvia, Cherry Hill was very proud of her. She belonged to the village, and at heart everyone liked her. She was very lovable and bright and free of manner; and not even Martha Beckett could accuse her of "pride."

When she came up to the platform, and stood beside the organ, among the flowers, her golden hair shining in the light of the chandelier above, she looked like a slender graceful flower herself, the very centre of the garden.

And then she sang; and a great hush fell over the church. It was a simple little melody; the joyous song of a young reaper returning from his labour, with the thought of home and loving arms to welcome him after the day's work. But it did not matter so much what Sylvia sang. Ever since she was a little girl in short pinafores, and stood on the school platform to sing, unaccompanied, on a Friday afternoon, she had commanded attention. There was that in her clear sweet notes that found the tender chord in every heart and set it vibrating. Like the old Scotch songs, she made folk smile when they were sad and greet when they were glad.

When the applause at the end was dying down, Hugh Balfour felt a pair of small hands clutch his sleeve. Janet had been sitting directly beneath him, since her recitation. She had crushed her way to the front so that she might sit as near him as possible; and had brought her train with her; all her friends who, like herself, had been left out of the choir. She had almost clapped her small hands off in her enthusiasm over the lovely singer; and, as Mr. Balfour did not clap as hard as she thought he should, she reached up and clutched his arm.

"Oh, Mr. Balfour!" she said in a loud whisper. "Isn't she grand? Don't you just love her?"

He turned and looked down at the little girl; and there was a strange expression in his eyes; the look of one not quite aroused from sleep. Then he seemed to awake suddenly, with a bewildered air.

"Oh, yes!" he exclaimed nervously. "She has a well-trained voice, Janet."

And then he stood up to announce the next number; and Janet was quite disappointed at his lack of enthusiasm.

When it was all over, Janet was so tired she could scarcely drag herself home. Her white dress was a wreck; her hair was wild; and her sash was dragging on the floor behind her; but she was supremely happy.

"Oh, my!" she declared, as she staggered up the steps of the Manse, "I never had such a good time in my life; and I thought I'd have a bad time because I had to wear this dress and stay out of the choir. But I guess I had too good of a time; 'cause I'm so tired I don't see how I'll ever say my prayers, Mother."

"You shouldn't run about so much and take things so strenuously, Janet," said her mother, looking down at her dishevelled daughter with worried eyes. "I'm sure you weren't still for one minute this evening." She went on out to the kitchen to consult Kirsty about the breakfast; and Janet went up the stairs with the help of Mr. Balfour's hand.

"I've got so many people that I ask God to bless, that I don't see how I'll ever get through them all to-night," she said, looking up at him appealingly. "There's all my cousins and aunts and uncles; and of course I pray a long time for poor Daddy; and there's all the boys and girls in the school; and the people in the congregation; and Miss Lena and Miss Mitchell; and then there's that lovely Miss Ward that sang. Oh, Mr. Balfour, don't you think she sings just like Nellie's canary? I do. It's better than silent singing I think, don't you?" Mr. Balfour was very silent to-night, and as absent-minded as her mother generally

was. Janet yawned as she stopped at the door of her room to say good-night.

"Do you think it would be very bad if I prayed for everybody together to-night, except Daddy?" she asked. "Bud says he wouldn't pray for everybody separate the way I do. He says when he says his prayers he just says, 'God bless the whole Jing Bang of us, Amen,' and that does just as well. Do you think it's very bad to say 'Jing Bang' in your prayers, Mr. Balfour?"

Mr. Balfour was very kind about it. He said that he did not think those were words that any nice little girl would like to use at any time. But he was sure that the dear Father in heaven would understand that she was very tired; and He would bless everybody just the same if she really ask Him, with her whole heart.

Janet staggered to bed very grateful, and very much relieved; her prayers were much curtailed, but she had time to add,—“And, please, bless Miss Sylvia Ward, and make her very good and happy.”

CHAPTER X

A LESSON IN HARMONY

WHEN Old Watty Sinclair renounced his family and his wealth and went to live alone in the old Bradley House, he did so in something of the spirit displayed by the pious monks of olden days. He had long bewailed the decadence of the times; there was no more of the old neighbourliness, he declared. Each family strove with each other family in seeing who could fling on the most style and fling away the most money. Churches were just a part of the wicked extravagance of the times with their organs and their carpets and their choirs. And, as for politics, anyone could see that the country was galloping straight down the road to ruin, as any country must that was ridden by a Tory government.

Two events finally drove the old man to open revolt. First his nephew, Tom, with whom he lived, committed the unpardonable crime of polling a Tory vote. Granted that the Tory candidate was an old neighbour's son; there was nothing could excuse a Sinclair becoming a turn-coat.

And right on top of this Tory vote, Tom's woman, the traitor's wife, placed the last straw upon the burden of luxury and treachery. Old Watty had controlled himself when the family was dragged from the comfort of the old log house and placed in the dreary grandeur of the new, which the neighbours in derision called the "Castle"; he had borne silently the noise and revelry of the stylish company from town; he had endured with only smothered complaints the wearing of a coat at meal-time; and had made no outward protest when the young folks bought an expensive car and took to rushing in to the town at night to

see the picture shows. But his soul had finally risen up in complete revolt before a potato salad, which Tom's woman had served when his old friend Johnny Gibson had dropped in for supper.

The Sinclairs had been poor in their pioneer days, Old Watty admitted; but he had never seen the day that they had not had a good meal for a neighbour. And now style and extravagance and fast living had led to setting an old friend down to cold potatoes! Cold potatoes,—and sour ones at that! Before dawn the next morning, Uncle Watty, his winter flannel shirts in the carpet bag he had brought from the old country, turned his back on the hollow show of the Castle; and trudging all the miles up to Cherry Hill, he established himself in the one dry room of the old Bradley House. And though it was five years since Tom's woman had set the salad before him, he had never gone back.

But though Old Watty renounced his family and the world and all its luxuries, he could not live without his weekly "Globe"; the newspaper which was the organ of the Liberal Party; for as Dr. Gillespie said, Old Watty was more than a Liberal, he was a "Grit." He had no money to subscribe for it; and he found a fierce satisfaction in the humility of borrowing it. So every Monday afternoon he went hobbling up to Doctor Gillespie's for the Saturday number, which Mrs. Gillespie always put carefully away for him. By the next Monday he had it all read, even to the advertisements; and had re-read the editorials, and the latest crimes of the Tories many times over.

As September waned the rheumatism that had troubled the old man for the past few winters began to return. The October days were warm and bright; but the nights were damp and misty. One wet Monday morning he was sitting by his window thinking it would likely be a bad afternoon for him to go after his paper, when he saw a little figure run out from a group of children on the way to school, cross the road, and tap on his door. He arose frowning. For some time after his arrival in Cherry Hill

the women of the village had tormented him with attentions. He was always being made the unwilling recipient of a loaf of new bread, or a pie or cake, or a roast chicken. He had managed to repel all such advances; and now he wondered, grumblingly, if the trouble was going to break out again.

He opened the door a very narrow crack; and a newspaper, followed by a small brown hand, was thrust in.

"Here's your paper, Mr. Watty," cried a bright, childish voice; and the next moment the messenger had scampered away across the street, and was lost to view in a crowd of companions.

When he had received his paper in this magic way for several Mondays, just as though the fairies had thrust it into his hand, Old Watty discovered who his little benefactor was. And one windy afternoon, seeing Janet and Nellie skipping past on their way home from school, he tapped on the window and beckoned them to come in.

Nellie held back in some fear, but Janet was very eager to accept the invitation; so, with Nellie holding on to her skirt, she walked boldly up the old sloping veranda floor and into the Bradley House.

The room that old Watty occupied had once been the bar-room. It was not very clean nor comfortable, and had an unpleasant smell of leather. There was an old rusty kitchen stove in the middle of the room with a warm fire in it; an old cupboard in the corner, and a four-post bed with a straw tick on it. A table and a couple of chairs, and the old man's work bench completed the furniture of the room.

Janet and Nellie seated themselves upon a box that lay near the stove, and looked around with absorbed interest. The old man limped towards the cupboard and took down from a shelf a small paper bag. He fumbled in it, and finally handed them each a half-dozen peppermint drops.

This was a splendid opening to their visit; and, Janet's tongue being loosed, she poured out a stream of questions. Did he like living here? Wasn't it lovely to have

such a big house to one's self? How many rooms were there in the Bradley House? Was there any furniture in them? Wouldn't it be a lovely place to have all your cousins and aunties visit you at the same time? Where did that door lead to? Were there as many rooms upstairs?

"Some day maybe you can come in and I'll let ye see all over it," he promised; and Janet and Nellie went away very much pleased with their visit. This was only the beginning of many calls. Having once been invited, Janet felt that she would always be welcome, and formed the habit of dropping in. Old Watty always had some peppermints in his paper bag in the cupboard; and there were certain wide echoing rooms in which he let her and Nellie run and play Hop Scotch on rainy days. Finally they explored them all, and the Bradley House with its great empty spaces, its big sheds, and its jungle of a garden at the back, proved a wonderfully interesting play-ground.

For a time Mrs. Meldrum was a little disturbed over this new acquaintance. Old Mr. Sinclair was highly respected in spite of his queer ways; but she felt he was scarcely better than the Kellys as a companion for Janet.

"I wish you and Nellie wouldn't go into the Bradley House after school, Janet. You must come straight home. You must be a trouble to the poor old man."

"Oh, no, we're not, Mother. Old Watty likes us; he said he did."

"Janet, you mustn't call Mr. Sinclair, Old Watty. It's very rude."

"But that's what everybody calls him, Mother," reasoned Janet. "Mr. Balfour calls him Old Watty; and so does Dr. Gillespie."

"They are grown men, and you are only a child; and you must show more respect for age. You must always call him Mr. Sinclair after this," and her mother turned to her reading again.

"But, Mother," Janet had not given up the argument, "nobody'll know who I mean. I call Miss Lena's father

Mr. Sinclair; and there's Mr. Sinclair away up the Town Line; and there's Katie Sinclair's father; and there's Old Grandpa Sinclair that lives in the Castle Down Below; and I don't see how we'd ever get along with another one."

Her mother looked up from her book to find that Janet was still talking.

"Couldn't I call him Mr. Watty?" she asked, "I don't think anyone in the congregation would think that was rude?" and her mother out of sheer weariness yielded.

Mrs. Meldrum had a comfortable theory that, except for going to and from school, her little daughter was kept rigidly removed from the village rabble. Nellie Gillespie or Lennie Caldwell were the only children who ever came to the Manse to play with Janet. But without actually disobeying orders, Janet managed to add to her social list. There was a very convenient hole in the back fence of the Manse garden, and from it a well-worn path ran around the back of the church into Old Gibbie Gibson's pasture field, and finally turned in at the rear of the last and most dilapidated woodshed on the Kelly estate. Janet had long ago learned that if she asked her mother if she might go over to the Kellys to play, she would meet with a firm refusal which no arguments could mitigate. Also, if she asked that the Kellys might be allowed to come and play in her yard the result would be equally hopeless. But on Saturday mornings she had found that a request to be allowed to run and play beside the creek in Old Gibbie Gibson's pasture field behind the church almost always met with a reluctant permission. And thither came all the Kellys, even to baby Cornelius, trundled along in a home-made cart; and it was then that Janet had the grandest time of the whole week.

Whenever the family were ready to move out to the pasture field Bud always came to the convenient hole in the fence and whistled a perfect imitation of the goldfinch's call; and when that sweet sound came floating up through the orchard trees Janet was neither to hold nor to bind.

On this lovely October Saturday morning, when the

argument over Old Watty's title had been settled, Janet ran out for the fifth time to listen for the summons. She had performed a great many little duties between excursions to the back door. She tidied her room; helped Kirsty with the breakfast dishes; dusted the parlour for her mother; wrote a long letter to her father; and even sat for five minutes untangling her thread, preparatory to taking a stitch in the perennial Saturday towel; and still the goldfinch was mute. Feeling that the time would never pass, she made an excursion upstairs to see if the flag was hung out. When she could coax Mr. Balfour out to play ball in the back pasture, there was nothing in the world that could add to her felicity. But the study door remained inexorable this morning. Mr. Balfour was evidently late with his sermon.

Janet tried hard to sing away her disappointment.

"I think a congregation is a great trouble, don't you, Mother?" she asked. "It keeps Mr. Balfour so busy he can't play ball or stay home any more."

Her mother smiled, one of those smiles which Janet knew meant she had a secret.

"You must remember that Mr. Balfour is young, dear; and can't stay home all the time."

"But he must be awfully tired going up to the Sinclairs, Mother. He's been up to Miss Lena's three nights this week; and he took Miss Sylvia Ward to her grandpa's Down Below; and then went for her again and brought her back; and Sam Sinclair has a car of his own. Martha Beckett says that the Sinclairs ought to adopt Mr. Balfour. Why should they, Mother? People don't adopt grown-up folks, do they? And he belongs to us anyway, doesn't he?"

There was no reply to this, except an admonition to be careful not to repeat what Martha Beckett or any of the girls said; and Janet went away unsatisfied, all the more so because of her mother's incomprehensible remark.

"I do hope it isn't the wrong one."

It was very difficult to accomplish anything with one

eye on the study door, and one ear down at the end of the back yard; so Janet finally went out to investigate the reason for Bud's absence. A whole Saturday without the Kellys was an arid waste. She ran down the orchard aisle, in the warm October sunlight, and stopped short at the hole in the fence. There was Bud's red head, just on the other side of it.

Janet gave a squeal of joy. "Oh, Bud! Where are the rest? Aren't you going to play? Why didn't you whistle?"

Bud was seated disconsolately upon a stone just outside Janet's yard. "Ma's washin'," he announced gloomily.

Janet's face fell. Mrs. Kelly did not wash often, fortunately; but, about once a month, and always on a Saturday, a fever of cleanliness seized her, when everything in the shape of raiment had to be put into the tub; and at the same time the family were put through a sort of mental cleansing process in which their mother told them all their sins and shortcomings at great and terrifying length. So the news that the monthly cleaning was on, was very bad indeed. Janet looked her sympathy.

"What's Molly doing?" she asked.

"Helpin' Ma; an' Rosie's mindin' Corny and Jimsey; an' Tim's carryin' water."

It occurred to Janet that if Mrs. Kelly would try singing in her heart it would ease the domestic situation greatly. So she rehearsed her experience as a member of the choir inaudible; and suggested his mother trying the remedy. "It's awfully good for everybody," she declared enthusiastically; as though it were a patent medicine and she the agent. "It makes you happy even when everything goes wrong, if you sing inside you."

"Sing inside you?" Bud's face wrinkled up so that the freckles all ran together. "Where?"

"Oh, away down in your stomach. If you are singing down there all the time, and not out loud, it makes you feel good."

"I'd rather have a hunk o' pie or some ice cream in my stomach," declared the materialistic one. "But I wish

Ma'd try it, whatever it is. You ast her some day. I wish she'd scold, 'way down in her stomach, where I couldn't hear her."

The majority of the young Kellys met the eruption of washday philosophically; for when everything was in its customary dirt and confusion Mrs. Kelly was a kind and indulgent mother. But Bud was a warm-hearted little fellow, passionately fond of his mother; and her monthly aberrations hurt his sensitive soul.

Janet sat down beside him in the opening in the fence. It was a terrible thing to have a mother who scolded, and she had no comfort to offer.

They looked up into the crimsoning trees and watched the birds gather for their autumn journey. Almost all the summer singers were gone away; but the robins whirled about in groups, uttering their quick clear call. The flickers, their golden lined wings outspread, flashed about the trees, great flocks of noisy grackles went sailing past; and over in the pasture field the crows were congregating to discuss plans for winter. There was one of their intimate friends left, a little grey song sparrow, that sat in the maple tree above their heads and gave forth his pretty carol as though it were June instead of October. Bud listened, looked up and laughed.

"Hear him, Janet! Hear what the funny little chap's sayin'? I bet the folks ain't washin' at his house or he wouldn't be singin' about a 'Happy Day.'"

"Oh, what's he saying?" asked Janet eagerly. Bud could never understand why anyone could not make out the birds' songs. They were plainer to him than his own language.

"Why, don't you hear him? Listen; that's what he says,— 'Happy day! Happy day! Haw, Haw! Hear me say.'"

Janet repeated the little song, over and over, and they laughed so loud the little composer flew away. Then a shy peewee, in the grove at the end of the pasture, where the stream came out of the hills, set up its soft tender pleading note,— "Dear-ie, Dear-ie." Bud repeated the pretty

whistle, and there came a soft answer, each time a little nearer.

Janet sat listening, breathless, to the little antiphonal song, until the shy, wild singer was right over Bud's head answering sweetly. Then there came past a wild whirr of wings; a great cloud of swallows coming up from the stream, calling to each other, and the little grey singer shot away.

Bud arose slowly. "I gotta get back," he announced sadly, "or she'll be after me!"

"Wait," cried Janet with a sudden inspiration, "I'll go with you, and we'll see if Rosie can come over and bring the baby; and we'll play behind the church. Mother said I could go out into the pasture."

This was some comfort and Bud cheered up a little. Janet darted back to a basket of apples that Kirsty had set out on the back porch, and selecting two of the biggest and reddest brought them to him. Then they crawled through the hole in the fence and together ran around behind the church. Away beyond the pasture field Bud's chickens, now grown to an independent life, were speeding over the stubble field, gleaning their food, while poor Tom waddled slowly after them, looking back longingly towards the creek.

The children climbed upon a section of the fence between two old sheds, that stood at the rear of the Kelly yard, and looked down into its disorderly desert. Rosie and the little ones were nowhere in sight. They had wisely taken themselves beyond the waves of the family washing. The tub was set out on the rotten old platform at the rear of the house; and the tall thin figure of Mrs. Kelly was going up and down before it in clouds of steam; while from out of them came bursts of shrill vituperation, like lightning from a storm cloud. The steady swish of the clothes in and out of the water added not a little to the illusion of rain. Mrs. Kelly always washed in a domestic thunder storm, which even her husband sought to escape. Ordinarily she was a kind and loving mother, but the

cares of a large family on a small and uncertain income, and a husband who went to the "Shanties" in winter and drank most of the proceeds of his work in summer, had naturally not helped to mellow a temper none to mild. But it was only on wash days that it really broke all bounds. When all the family clothing had been worn over and over again till there was no way out of the difficulty except a washing; it seemed that Mrs. Kelly piled all her life's grievances upon the top of the soiled pile, and, surveying them, her spirit rose up in rebellion. And then woe betide the man or child who crossed her path.

To Janet the sound of scolding was terrible; more terrible still was the sight of Molly's little stooped figure moving in and out of the kitchen door, right in the heart of the storm. Mrs. Kelly shrieked to Tim to hurry with the water, which he was drawing up out of the cistern; and at the same time demanded threateningly as to the whereabouts of Rosie and Bud. As she raised her head to glare about, Janet and Bud with one accord dropped down behind the fence; and Bud slipped hopelessly into the yard, while Janet strayed disconsolately back to the Manse.

She peeped into the kitchen, on her return, to see if there was a chance of coaxing a cookie from Kirsty. The kitchen floor had just received its Saturday scrubbing; and Kirsty, in a clean white apron, was sitting at the shining table reading her Bible. Janet drew back hastily; when the kitchen floor had just been scrubbed it was unsafe for anyone to enter unbidden; but when combined with that, Kirsty sat and read her Bible; the fool who rushed in took his life in his hands.

She wandered about wondering how she could put in a Budless Saturday; and finally, with a great sigh of renunciation, went out to the orchard with Pepper; and evoking Leola from the shadows, prepared to put in the day with her rather unsubstantial company. But she could not forget the drooping figure of Molly, moving in and out of the kitchen, a target for the fiery darts of her mother's temper. She wished with all her heart that she could

do something to make her sing and make melody in her heart.

Mr. Balfour came out to the orchard for a few minutes' play before dinner; and when they had exhausted themselves racing about, they sat down on the back steps in the sunshine, and Janet told him about Molly and the washing, and her longing to do something to make Molly's life a little happier.

"I wish Mrs. Kelly wouldn't wash any more, ever again," she declared at the end of the recital. "Oh, Mr. Balfour, don't you wish that everyone in the world could sing in their hearts?"

He looked up at the little girl perched on the railing of the steps like a restless bird upon a branch, and his eyes were very kind. She was expressing the longing of all unselfish souls.

"Each one of us can do our little part to make somebody sing," he said. "You watch Molly and see if you can't find some way to make her happy. You are sure to find a way if you look long enough, and carefully enough."

And, sure enough, the next week the opportunity to help Molly to be very happy came; just as Mr. Balfour had said it would.

Every week the Fourth Class had an essay to write. The subject was given out on a Friday afternoon before school was dismissed, and the essays had to be handed in the following Wednesday morning. Then Miss Mitchell examined them and handed them back on the next Friday, pointing out their good and bad qualities.

As Janet and Nellie and Bud were still in the Third Book, they had no essays to write, and yet Janet was very much interested in them, for Lennie was in the Junior Fourth Book, being fully twelve, and he was always in a panic on Tuesday evening because his essay was never ready. He often came to the Manse and begged that Janet might be allowed to come over, and then he got such help

as she could give him, for Janet had a gift with her pen if none with her voice.

But Janet's chief interest arose from the fact that Molly very often won first place in the weekly competition. Her most dangerous rival was Aggie Wright, the biggest girl in the Fourth Class, who wrote essays filled with words of learned length and thundrous sound; and Janet was always filled with anxiety on the morning the essays were returned, lest Aggie get ahead of her favourite. So, on the next Wednesday morning Janet was very much excited, when, as Miss Mitchell collected the papers, she made the thrilling announcement: "I am going to give prizes for the three best essays this week. I didn't tell you before, because I wanted the winner to be one who always takes pains; and I did not want your extra effort. I am going to send these essays in to town to the Principal of the school there. He is going to examine them and say whose is the best, and next Friday afternoon I shall tell you the result and give the prizes. They will be: two dollars for first prize, one dollar for second, and fifty cents for third prize. Fourth Class, take your seats. Third Class, forward."

The Fourth Class fell into its seat overcome with astonishment. Such a storm of whispering arose from the back rows that Miss Mitchell made a further announcement: anyone who spoke from now till four o'clock should stay in half an hour; and so the Fourth Class was driven to telegraphic communication, notes, and the deaf-and-dumb alphabet to express its feelings.

Lennie belonged to those to whom the announcement had been the echo of the saddest words of tongue or pen; when he reflected that he might have been in the race for the prize. But an untoward fate had made him hand in a hurried, badly-written essay that morning. He bewailed his misfortune at great length to Janet and Nellie as he walked sedately home from school, stepping along the sidewalk, while the little girls skipped through the dust of the street.

"I didn't think Miss Mitchell would do a thing like that,"

he complained. "And two dollars for a prize! Oh, girls, just think of all the things you could get with two dollars!"

"There's an advertisement in a paper Fred takes," said Nellie, not realising that she was adding to poor Lennie's remorse, "and it says that if you pay a dollar down, no a dollar and a half,—and some more after that, and get some subscribers for the paper, you can get a Shetland pony!"

Lennie was almost in tears; but Janet had not as much sympathy to give him as usual; she danced away home to tell Mr. Balfour the news that Molly was almost sure to get a prize.

The very next day Miss Mitchell startled the school again with another thrilling announcement. They were to postpone the prize giving until a week from Friday. There would be some grown-up person of importance appointed to present the prizes; and they would use that afternoon as a sort of visitors' day; and the pupils might invite their parents to come. There would be a programme; and anyone who would give a recitation or sing a song was to wait after school and see her.

It was well that she did not tell all this until just before school was dismissed; for it was impossible that anyone could keep from whispering under such a strain. Everyone, but the big boys like Tim Kelly and Spotty Cameron, waited to ask if they might take part in the programme; and when finally everyone started home the one topic of conversation among the girls of the Fourth Class was, what should they wear?

"I wish I didn't have to sit with Molly Kelly," complained Aggie Wright, as they came straying down the stony path towards the road. "She wears such a dreadful dress. Just look at her now. Ain't she awful?"

Janet liked Aggie Wright only mildly. She was quite the biggest girl in school; and wore dresses down to her ankles; and put up her hair a new way every week; and did not like little girls at all. Janet sometimes felt that if Aggie was

not a Pickin' and Leavin' she certainly acted like one; and she was disposed to put her on the bottom shelf.

Janet paid little attention to clothes, either her own or other people's; and now, for the first time, she noticed that Molly's dress was not like the other girls'. It was a hybrid affair, made from the faded skirt of her summer dress, sewed to a blouse of a dark heavy material. Molly was walking alone ahead of the other girls, and Janet ran after her and linked her arm in hers.

She gave her arm a squeeze that was almost painful. "I just bet you'll get the prize, Molly, so I do!"

"What are you going to wear on Friday, Janet?" asked Nellie, who was following close on her heels.

Janet had not given the subject a thought. "I don't know; a dress I guess," she answered vaguely. "I hope Mother won't make me wear my Sunday dress."

"Why, we're all going to wear our Sunday dresses," declared Jessie Cameron, who was one of the competitors for the prize.

"All us big girls in the Fourth Class'll have to dress up; but it doesn't matter about kids like Nellie and Janet," said Aggie Wright over her shoulder, as she turned to go down the road towards her home.

"Well, it does so matter," cried Nellie indignantly. "I'm going to wear my white serge if Mother'll let me, and you're goin' to wear your blue, aren't you, Kit?"

Kitty Gillespie was a thoughtful girl for her thirteen short years, and she glanced at Molly's downcast face, and Rosie's ragged cotton dress, and said nothing. Nellie followed her glance, and putting her fair curls up close to Janet's rumpled brown head, she whispered:

"Say, Janet, Molly and Rosie haven't any better dresses than the ones they've got on. Isn't that awful?"

Just then Cornelius Kelly, who had run away from home by crawling under the gate, and was staggering down the middle of the street in a joyous cloud of dust, sighted his sisters approaching, and greeted them with a welcoming whoop. . Corny was a jolly, noisy, rowdy of a baby, the

joy of his sisters' hearts. The Kelly girls and Janet left their companions and ran to meet him with cries of delight; and in the rapture of his presence, the troublesome question of clothes was forgotten for the moment.

"I just know you'll get the prize, Molly," Janet declared again, as she reluctantly turned homeward; but Molly shook her head above Corny's curls.

"No, I hope I don't. I won't go to school on Friday, if the girls all dress up fine." Janet was dismayed to see the tears in Molly's patient eyes. Rosie, too, looked at her in surprise. For Rosie was like Janet and took no thought for her raiment.

All that evening Janet's busy mind returned again and again to the thought of Molly's troubles, and before morning she had discovered a fine scheme by which she could be saved the humiliation of appearing the only shabby one in a class of Sunday dresses.

She disclosed her plan to Mr. Balfour at the breakfast table, and he approved highly. "That's a fine idea, Jenny Melody," he cried. "And it will make all the other girls sing in their hearts, too, as well as Molly; because people are always happy when they are doing a kindness to someone else."

When Janet went to school the next morning, she avoided the Kellys for the first time in her life. She raced past their gate, unseen even by Bud, and dashed into the Gillespie yard.

"I've got the loveliest beautifulest idea in the wide world," she shouted. "Wouldn't it be lovely if all the girls in the school would wear their old dresses on Friday, and then Molly wouldn't feel bad if she did get the prize?"

Nellie did not look as if she considered it a lovely idea at all; but Kitty's eyes were very kind. She looked up the street at Molly's stooped, drab figure coming out of the Kelly gate, with Rosie's ragged, greenish-yellow cotton frisking ahead.

"Aw, yes, I think it would be lovely, Janet," she said. "I'll ask the girls, and see what they say."

As soon as prayers were over, Kitty whispered the plan to her chum, Jessie Cameron. She was rather surprised at the ready response. She did not know that Jessie's mother had discouraged the idea of the Sunday dress parade; and she found it very easy to fall in with the generous scheme.

At recess the two girls laid the plan before their classmates, while Molly was otherwise engaged. There was a great deal of discussion, and more dissension at first, but finally all the girls, with one exception, consented to forego all extraordinary finery on Friday for the sake of Molly Kelly's feelings.

The one exception was Aggie Wright, and Aggie had much more to sacrifice than the other girls. She was the only child of well-to-do parents; and her wardrobe was the wonder of Cherry Hill school. At present she was possessed of a marvellous new dress which only a favoured few had seen. It was a bright pink silk, trimmed with white lace, and had been given to her by a foolish mother on her birthday. Aggie had had no opportunity to wear it as yet; and she wanted more than anything else in the world to wear it on Friday. She had a deeper reason than personal vanity. For though Aggie Wright was fat and broad and stodgy she was exceedingly romantic. She had read a great many novels in which the heroine was always a lovely creature of sixteen, with whom a rich young Lord or Duke fell madly in love. In her dreams Aggie was always the lovely young creature; while various persons played the part of the gallant nobleman. Just now he was incarnated in the person of the young minister of Knox Church. Aggie was fifteen and felt sure anyone would think she was eighteen to look at her. And there was no doubt that Mr. Balfour would prefer her bright youth to such old maids as Martha Beckett and Lena Sinclair who were always running after him; and who, everyone knew, must both have reached the hopeless age of twenty-five at least.

So Aggie was guarding a secret rosy hope in her fluttering heart. Miss Mitchell had said *Someone* would present

the prizes. And rumour had it that *he* would be the someone. She was reasonably sure of getting a prize,—she might indeed get first, and if she received it from his hands, dressed in her pink silk! Aggie's round freckled face grew as pink as the dress at the glorious thought. So the girls had no idea of all they were asking her to sacrifice. And Aggie would not promise.

But the very day before the Great Occasion Miss Mitchell stood up and blasted all Aggie's girlish dreams by the cruel announcement that the Rev. Mr. Harrison, the Methodist minister from "Down Below," would give an address on Friday, and present the prizes. Aggie listened in disgust. Mr. Harrison was old and married and short-sighted. But there was still a faint hope that Mr. Balfour might be present; so she hunted up Janet Meldrum at recess; and was so pleasant to her that before the interview was over Janet felt that Aggie ought to be moved up a shelf.

"I s'pose your Ma and Mr. Balfour will be coming to school on Friday," Aggie asked quite casually, holding out a paper bag of chocolate drops. Janet took a handful and answered cordially. She was always glad to tell all she knew about everything.

"No, Mother can't come," she said, munching happily. "She promised to go to a meeting or something in West Hampton. She's 'most always going there. They have an awful lot of meetings in West Hampton, and they keep Mother busy."

Here Janet paused, struck dumb with admiration at the sight of Bud standing on his red head at the other end of the school yard. Aggie waited in vain, and then ventured the trembling question:

"I s'pose Mr. Balfour won't be coming either."

"No, he can't come either. Miss Mitchell wanted him to give out the prizes, and he wanted to, but he has to go to Presbytery. It's in Algonquin and he has to go. Isn't it too bad?"

Aggie quite agreed that it was entirely too bad. Her bright hopes faded. It didn't matter what she wore; she

would join the ranks of martyrs. But she felt that she might as well earn some recognition for it. "I'm going to wear this old dress, Janet," she said, "'cause you wanted all the girls to wear their old things. Isn't Molly's dress awful?"

Dress was not the only subject of importance in connection with the coming event. There was a very fine programme prepared. Miss Mitchell chose Lennie Caldwell as chairman, and his mother wrote a wonderful speech for him, and he recited it to Janet the afternoon before the prize-giving, without a single mistake. Janet was to recite a poem called "Jack-in-the-pulpit," because Mr. Balfour liked it very much, seeing it was about a preacher. Nellie and Susie were to sing, "It is lovely May," entirely unmindful of the fact that it was lovely October. There were to be two dialogues by the older pupils; and at the end of the programme Mr. Harrison was to present the prizes.

On Thursday, the day before the big occasion, the Fourth Class remained at school after four o'clock to help Miss Mitchell decorate the room. Spotty Cameron and Tim Kelly went up to the grove and brought down boughs of cedar and balsam; and hung them around the bare cracked walls; and the girls wound garlands of scarlet maple leaves and mountain ash berries among the green. The little school-room was transformed into a garden; and they turned the key on its fragrance and beauty; and reluctantly left it waiting for the great event.

CHAPTER XI

RUSHED THE DISCORD IN

THAT night winter sent a heralding wind dancing down from the northern hills. It swept over Cherry Hill; and all the brilliant leaves of all the glorious trees that lined the village street left their homes, and went dancing away after their Pied Piper. A nip of frost in the clear air sent the boys and girls racing to school, flinging the rustling leaves over their heads, and leaping for joy that winter was coming.

When they all returned to school after dinner the boys had set the big stove roaring; and the little school-room was warm, and heavily scented with the perfume of cedar and balsam boughs. All the big girls, true to their promise, returned in their school dresses; and Molly looked quite smart in Janet's best lace collar, and a string of pink beads Kitty Gillespie had loaned her.

It was just a few minutes before the time for the bell to ring; the older girls were putting the final touches to the maple wreaths; and Aggie Wright was fastening some red berries in her hair; when Janet Meldrum came whirling in, quite incoherent with her great news.

"Mr. Balfour's coming to give out the p-p-prizes, after all!" she cried, stuttering with joy. "Mr. Harrison telephoned that he had to go to a funeral. Somebody died Down Below. Isn't that lovely? An' Mr. Balfour's coming back early from Algonquin so's he'll be here!"

This was great tidings. Every boy and girl in Cherry Hill knew Mr. Balfour and liked him; but to one heart the message brought a mingling of delight and despair. Aggie Wright's beat rapidly beneath her ruffled plaid blouse.

Mr. Balfour coming, and that wonderful pink silk dress lying away in the closet at home! Here was the great opportunity of her life; and she would have to meet it in an old plaid dress she had worn all last spring. If she were in her pink silk, with the pink bow on her hair! The bell rang like a knell breaking into her dream; and school was called for the short afternoon session. Aggie sat through it, realising nothing of what was going on. She walked out for the early recess, seeing only the vision of a silken clad beauty receiving the first prize from the hands of the young minister, and an adoring look from his handsome eyes.

Recess was to be very short; for the visitors were expected immediately afterwards. The Fourth Class girls gathered in little groups about the door, to watch for any possible early visitors; while the younger children, Janet in the midst, went rolling and tumbling about in the rain-bow drifts of fallen leaves.

Aggie Wright wandered disconsolately around the wood-pile to the back of the school. Just beyond the low broken fence lay her father's farm; and only a couple of fields away stood her home, down there among the yellow orchard trees. And in that home lay the pink silk gown. Aggie looked across the brown fields much as Eve must have looked at the forbidden tree. And then the serpent whispered that she would be as a goddess if she wore thereof; and the next moment Aggie fell. She fell over the low remnant of a fence that divided her father's fields from the school-yard; and went scurrying down the hill, her short legs making marvellous progress over the brown stubble.

"Where's Aggie Wright off to?" cried Tom Gibson's Tilly in her high shrill voice. Tilly Tom, as everyone called her, was the tallest girl in Cherry Hill school. She had a very long neck and large protruding eyes, and was able to survey everything over other people's heads.

"There's Aggie Wright off home!" she called; and all the Fourth Class girls came running to see.

"What's she goin' home for, I'd like to know?" cried Jessie Cameron suspiciously. "She ain't sick is she?"

"Hello, Aggie!" they all shouted. "Where are you goin'?"

But Aggie neither turned nor heeded. She had set her hand to the plough and was making it go so fast there was no time to look back.

The rest of the pupils went stamping indoors, at the call of the bell; and were scarcely seated when the visitors began to arrive. The first was Lennie Caldwell's big sister, Kate, who went to the High School in Algonquin. She came rustling in, dressed in a new shiny green silk, and went swishing straight up to the teacher's desk with an important message. Her mother was delayed, she said, and could not be present for the first of the programme; and she wanted Lennie's speech postponed until she should be there to hear it.

She was followed closely by the Camerons' mother, and Spider Gibson's mother, and then came old Mr. and Mrs. Gibbie Gibson, and Mrs. Beckett, and Mrs. Gillespie, and a half-dozen others.

The guests arranged themselves on benches along the wall; the pupils settled themselves in their accustomed places; and Miss Mitchell, her cheeks very pink with nervousness, stood up and touched her little bell for order: Just as everyone grew quiet, the door opened hurriedly; and all heads were turned to see who it was. It was Aggie Wright. She slipped into her seat, breathing very hard. She wore her long grey winter coat, buttoned up to her chin; and the next moment she emerged from it, like a brilliant butterfly from a grey cocoon; and sat there before the astonished eyes of Cherry Hill school in all the shimmering glory of her pink silk gown!

There is no doubt it was a wonderful dress, even for Aggie, whose dresses were all very grand; and the feminine side of the Fourth Class sat staring in mingled admiration and indignation. It was a mean, horrid trick, they all whispered to each other, when they were capable of

speech, just a mean, nasty, sneaky thing Aggie Wright had gone and done; and besides she had promised to wear her old dress, like the others; and therefore she was guilty of the added sin of telling a whopper; and every girl in the Fourth Class could prove it! But for all that, there was no denying that the pink silk dress was the most beautiful thing that had ever been seen in Cherry Hill. It was silk; there was no smallest doubt of that, taffeta silk that shone like Lake Simcoe and rustled like the poplars behind the school. And it was pink—oh, a marvellous pink, like Wellington Caldwell's prize roses. It was trimmed with ruffles of white lace, wherever lace could be put on, and it was buttoned down the back with six beautiful round pearl buttons that gleamed like shells from the sea. It was very tight at the waist, and Aggie looked quite slim where the pink ribbon sash was tied in a bewitching bow, but the waist met only under protest across Aggie's broad back; and between the shining pearl spheres there appeared a gaping stretch of comfortable grey flannel, which a cautious mother had insisted upon Aggie wearing. But whatever discrepancies the buttons had left behind, Aggie was a perfect vision in front. Her sleeves were short, and bore a deep lace ruffle that fell over her plump arms; and her hair, which she had curled carefully the night before, was topped by an immense bow of ribbon the same wonderful shade as the dress.

Poor Molly's feeble charms: Janet's white lace collar, and Kitty Gillespie's string of coral beads faded away in the radiance that flowed over her from the vision at her side.

The other Fourth Class girls were equally overcome. Only one of them had the spirit to struggle against her fate. Annie MacKay, who lived near the school, and owned a new red dress trimmed with black velvet, held up her hand. She asked Miss Mitchell if she might run home for something she had forgotten; and the class held its breath for the answer.

But just at that moment Spider Gibson's father, who was

a trustee, entered the room; and Miss Mitchell frowned and shook her head; and Aggie was left to shine alone, the only star in an ill-dressed firmament.

Meanwhile Lennie had taken his place upon the platform, with the utmost composure; and the programme was started, his speech being deferred until the arrival of his proud mother. Janet was called early, much to her disappointment; she had been hoping she might wait until Mr. Balfour was there to hear her. She was disappointed, too, that Miss Lena missed her. She had stayed behind to help Mr. Balfour with some Sunday School reports he was hurrying to get off with the afternoon mail.

When Janet had galloped through her verses, Nellie and Susie sang their little May song very sweetly. Then Rosie recited a very funny Irish piece that made everyone laugh. Lennie was getting very anxious and kept looking out of the window throughout each performance; for the programme was drawing to a close and the chairman's opening address had not yet been given. At last, when he was almost in tears, the door opened and Mrs. Caldwell rustled in, as full of anxiety as the chairman himself.

As soon as she had loosened her fur, and settled her hat straight, Lennie stood up and began:

"Ladies and Gentlemen, fellow-students——" Lennie was dressed in his best suit and wore a wide white collar and a bright silk tie. His shoes were polished and his hair was smooth and shining; and no wonder his mother gazed at him in pride and delight. He recited his speech perfectly, never stumbling over even the biggest word, and never missing one of the gestures in which his sister had trained him.

But it was just this perfection of looks and action, the white collar and the flowing sentences that helped to bring about the evil plot that was being hatched at the other end of the room. Away in the abandoned region of the back seat Spotty Cameron and Tim Kelly were sitting, looking at the young orator as the king of the forest might look at the antics of a performing toad. When Lennie came to his

phrase about "Integrity, Industry and Intelligence" something rose up within Spotty Cameron's heart that could not be smothered, something akin to the feeling that the lion might have experienced when the toad grew wearisome and supper time was at hand. Spotty whispered to Tim; Tim doubled up over his desk in a spasm of joy, and whispered the good news to Spider Gibson. Spider also took a spasm, and whispered to Ed Sinclair; and when Ed had regained his self-control, he leaned across the aisle and rummaged in Bud Kelly's desk.

Bud was absent, having taken advantage of Miss Mitchell's preoccupation to visit a friend in a distant part of the room. But his storehouse was available. Bud Kelly's desk was always full of strange merchandise. He was a born collector; and since the season for bugs was over, he had taken to collecting spices. There was no reason for this: it was merely that he felt a compelling impulse to collect something; and that very morning he had added three kinds of pepper to his museum, having negotiated a trade with Sam MacKay, whose father kept the village store. Tim knew what addition had been made to his brother's collection, and in a moment the fatal packet was passed to the back seat.

Miss Mitchell leaned over to whisper something, in admiration of Lennie's oratory, to Mrs. Caldwell; and Spotty Cameron arose nonchalantly and rearranged the stove damper.

Unfortunately for the plotters, Lennie reached the end of his address too soon. A moment later he finished up with another grand sentence containing "Industry, Intelligence and Integrity"; and took his seat amidst long and loud stamping and clapping.

The back seat was disgusted that it had been so slow. "Aw, why didn't we think of it sooner!" groaned Tim.

"It would 'a' been dandy to see him sneeze his silly head off, right in the middle o' one o' them long stuck-up words," said Spotty, who was also suffering the pangs of regret.

There was some apprehension mingled with the regret.

There was no chance to undo the evil they had started ; and in due time the terrible consequences would arise. They ducked their heads over their desks in spasms of hysterical laughter.

The applause over Lennie's address had scarcely died away, when the door opened and Miss Lena Sinclair entered, looking flushed and bright-eyed and very happy ; and behind her came the tall figure of the young minister of Knox Church.

The pink bow on the top of Aggie Wright's head fluttered and nodded like a rose in the summer breeze ; and Janet fairly jumped out of her seat and said, "Oh," right out loud before she could hold back her delight. Mr. Balfour went up to the platform and took the seat Miss Mitchell had saved for him. He looked around the room and beamed upon them all. He loved children, and was at his happiest when among them. The two culprits in the back seat could not but feel that his eyes had a knowing look, as they turned towards them. They had played ball with him down in Wright's pasture ; and they knew by experience that he had an uncanny knowledge of what was inside a fellow. But his smiling eyes were roving about in search of Janet. She was leaning away out in the aisle to catch his glance, her long braid almost touching the floor. He smiled radiantly when he saw her ; and she fairly curled up with joy ; and ventured to wave her hand, just the least little bit, when Miss Mitchell was not looking.

The teacher took a sheet of paper out of her desk, and handed it to Mr. Balfour. Everyone knew it contained the names of the prize-winners, and a death-like stillness fell over the room. Mr. Balfour took the paper and arose, looking very wise and solemn, in spite of the twinkle in his eyes. He was about to speak, when Miss Mitchell touched him gently on the arm. Would he please excuse her while she asked the Fourth Class to stand ? They were all competitors for the prizes.

The Fourth Class stood up. Spider, Tim and Spotty shuffled out and stood with hanging heads, bursting with

unseemly laughter, waiting for the heavens to fall. Aggie Wright flitted out into the middle of the aisle, like a beautiful bird of paradise. She put one plump hand to the bow on the top of her head, and the other behind to see if the sorely strained pearl buttons were all doing their duty. Mr. Balfour came to the front of the platform, paper in hand, and said, "Girls and boys," and then the first crack of the falling heavens sounded.

The chairman gave a loud rude sneeze,—Lennie, who was always so polite! The school giggled, Miss Mitchell looked pained, and raised her eyebrows at the sneezer. It was not like Lennie to do anything improper. Then Tilly Tom, who sat near the stove, also sneezed, a loud screaming sneeze; and put her sleeve to her eyes. Next, Kitty Gillespie began to cough violently; and then an epidemic of coughs and sneezes and giggles broke out around the stove. Mr. Balfour went on with his speech undisturbed, but there was a half-amused half-quizzical look on his face, which the two chief sneezers in the back seat could not but regard with fear. Who knew but he, himself, had known boys, long, long ago in his school-days, who put pepper on stoves? The storm of sneezing grew; Mr. Balfour raised his voice; Miss Mitchell's face grew as pink as Aggie Wright's silk dress; and her angry eyes travelled down to the abandoned corner where her suspicion always unerringly pointed, when things went wrong. Molly was the next victim; she sneezed a quiet, limp, patient sort of sneeze, as though she had scarcely enough physical energy to get rid of it. And then, just as Mr. Balfour said: "I shall now give the names of the winners," a terrible thing happened. Aggie Wright sneezed, oh, such a sneeze! It was bigger and louder and more robust than all the other sneezes in chorus. It seemed to come from the toes of her shiny new boots, and leap to the top of the pink bow on her hair; a loud, convulsive, resounding "A-a-chay," that seemed to relieve all the painful restrictions the pink dress had put upon poor Aggie's inner organs all afternoon. And then, with no time for a handkerchief to be snatched from the silken pocket, there came a second

explosion, more emphatic than the first. As it burst from Aggie's pink silk person, the strain was too much for the tight dress; and each of the six pearl buttons that shone like the shells of the sea,—every single one of them,—burst from its place with a sickening sound of rending thread, and flew in six different directions, landing like a small hail of bullets with a snap and rattle all over the school-room!

Poor Aggie! The sudden relief from the painful tightness brought a horrible fear. She put back one hand and clutched wildly at the gaping breach the treacherous buttons had left in the wake of their cowardly desertion; and then she sank into her seat with a gasp of dismay, and another sneeze that almost finished her disintegration. And just at that moment the prize-winners were called to the front.

Big good-natured Tilly Tom reached her long arm out to poor Aggie's aid with a big safety-pin which she had generously spared from a precarious skirt. With this she endeavoured to repair the gaping breach of grey flannel. Friendly hands proffered pins; and, restored from all directions, came in the miscreant buttons, whose untimely flight had caused the disaster.

Meanwhile the prize-giving was going on; though the giver had almost been driven to cover by the storm of sneezes and giggles and buttons, and by a yearning desire to sneeze himself. Poor Aggie did not even notice that Molly Kelly had won the first prize, Charlie John Gibson the second, and she herself the third. She could not go forward for even the third prize from Mr. Balfour's hands. He looked about enquiringly, wiping his eyes, and Miss Mitchell whispered something, and took it from him, herself. Evidently Mr. Balfour had no notion that the pink silk wreck near the stove was the Aggie Wright of the third prize; and Aggie felt as Cinderella might have felt had her finery all vanished in the ballroom, just as the Prince asked her to dance! When Molly stood up, starry-eyed, her cheeks pink with excitement, and Mr. Balfour shook hands with her, and congratulated her upon her clever essay, Aggie

put her beribboned head down upon the desk and gave way to heaving sobs.

While Molly was reading her essay to the audience Miss Mitchell tip-toed down the aisle. She laid the third prize on the desk beside Aggie's bowed head, with a word of commiseration; and, stepping across the aisle, addressed the Back Seat in low but terrible tones, promising a dread reckoning when the visitors had departed. The windows and doors were thrown open; the atmosphere cleared. The school rose and sang "O Canada" and everybody went home.

Poor Aggie grabbed her long coat from which she had emerged so dazzlingly only a few hours before, and flinging it over the glory that had been her downfall, she dashed out of school and homeward, weeping violently. The girls of her class watched her go with unsoftened hearts. Nobody approached her with a word of sympathy. Good-natured Tilly could not follow her as her heart prompted; having been deprived of the one pin that made movement safe; and the Fourth Class girls saw in her disgrace only a just retribution.

CHAPTER XII

BLACKIE JOINS THE CHOIR INVISIBLE

JANET was not at all sure that her third great attempt to spread the music of life had been a success. To be sure Molly had won the first prize; and the girls had worn their old dresses; and no one saw Molly's shabby dress, anyway, for everyone was busy wiping her eyes. But she felt that circumstances had been rather hard on Aggie Wright.

"I wouldn't like to have a silk dress," she stated to Mr. Balfour, the next evening, as they sat cosily before the study fire. "It must be an awful bother to mind, and it must be awfuller to have one that goes to pieces when you sneeze. I guess Aggie was sorry she wore hers."

"It was hard luck, certainly," Mr. Balfour said, looking into the fire with very solemn eyes.

"Mrs. Caldwell said that Providence sent a punishment on her for being vain," said Janet gravely. Mrs. Caldwell was a very pious woman and had no difficulty in tracing divine judgment in all her neighbours' adversities.

"Providence means God, doesn't it? Well, I don't think it was God. I think it was the pepper the boys put on the stove," she continued, feeling inclined, as usual, to argue the question. "It doesn't seem like a trick God would do," she continued, stroking Blackie, who lay on her lap. "He wouldn't snatch away Aggie's buttons like that, without any warning, would He, Mr. Balfour?"

"No, I don't believe He would," said Mr. Balfour. "We often bring trouble on ourselves by our foolishness; or someone else brings it by their selfishness; and it is wrong to blame our kind Father in Heaven when it comes."

Janet listened, very much interested. Everything con-

nected with religion had taken on a new colour since Mr. Balfour had come to Cherry Hill. Every grown-up person, it seemed, had a different view of what being a Christian meant. With Daddy it meant that she must obey him and Mother, and not neglect her Sunday School lesson. According to her mother's creed it evidently meant being always prettily dressed, and having nice manners at the table; and with Kirsty, being a good girl was to sit all the time without moving, and never, never want to go away from the house; or have anyone in to play and make a noise.

But Mr. Balfour's idea of being a Christian seemed just everybody having a good time; or, rather, it was seeing that everybody else had a good time; and then you were sure to have a wonderful time yourself. And it seemed that you might sing and make melody unto the Lord, and please Him, even while your hair was all around your ears, and your clothes in tatters.

She sighed happily. "Molly got the two dollars, anyway," she declared jubilantly. "And she's going to buy her mother a new shawl."

Mr. Balfour did not answer. He had seated himself at his desk, and was writing a letter; and Janet made Pepper lie down on his cushion; and tried hard not to talk. But she could not be quiet very long.

"You've got a lot more letters to write than you used to, haven't you?" she enquired sympathetically. Writing letters was, to Janet's mind, a heavy task.

"Why? Do I write more than usual?"

"Oh, yes, ever so many more. But you stay home more, since Sylvia Ward went away. I used to miss you awfully, when you went up to Miss Lena's so much."

The young man made marks on his blotter with his pen; and looked very much embarrassed.

"It's so lonesome when you go visiting up at Miss Lena's; and Mother goes to a meeting; and Blackie runs away—I've only got Kirsty and Pepper left."

"Blackie? Does he go out evenings?" asked Mr. Balfour, plunging eagerly into this subject as a means of escape.

Janet shook her head solemnly. "Yes, he does; and he does worse things than that. I'm afraid he's growing up to be a very bad pussy. He's getting so greedy. Yes, you are, Blackie, you needn't look at me that way. You know you're naughty."

"Tell me about him," said Mr. Balfour anxiously. "What's he been doing?"

Janet confessed Blackie's evil deeds with deep humiliation. His chief sin, it appeared, was a growing appetite that nothing could appease. Kirsty declared there was no filling him. His saucer of milk was like the consommé at the beginning of a dinner. He was caught by Bud, several times, prowling round other people's back yards like an alley cat who belonged to nobody, instead of a respectable member of the minister's family; and to pile up the sum of his crimes, he had even dared to steal from Kirsty's pantry!

This was really serious; for Janet knew that if Blackie became obnoxious to Kirsty, he would be banished to the barn or perhaps farther. "I'm afraid I haven't brought him up right," Janet confessed, stroking the soft black satin coat.

"Parents are to blame when their children grow up bad," Mr. Balfour said, shaking his head solemnly.

Janet's one dimple, which hid in her left cheek, peeped out. It was very hard to be solemn when Mr. Balfour used that tone.

"Mrs. Caldwell says Mother isn't bringing me up properly," she said cheerfully. "She says I need more discipline. What's discipline, Mr. Balfour?"

"It's a kind of medicine that Blackie needs," he said, trying to turn the current of her thoughts; and thinking something about Mrs. Caldwell which would have astounded that complacent lady. "What's this Kirsty's been telling me about his eating the tail off the fish yesterday?"

Blackie's latest black deed was related, with much shame. It was really a disgraceful affair, that of the fish; and

Janet trembled to think what might be his fate at Kirsty's hands should the like occur again.

Blackie lay stretched on Janet's lap, during the recital, blinking at the fire, purring loudly, and looking as innocent as if he were a nice white kitten, instead of a middle-aged cat with a record as black as his glossy coat.

"I'll learn him a lesson some day," threatened Kirsty, coming in with an armful of wood for the fire. "That cat'll come till a bad end, mark my word."

Kirsty was a staunch Presbyterian, and despised all superstitions. She scoffed at people like that ignorant Irish-woman, Mrs. Murphy, who would not make her soap unless it was "the right of the moon." And yet Kirsty had had a Highland Scotch mother, and she was not just prepared to state absolutely that there were no fairies, warlocks, witches and such like. And though she would never admit it, she always regarded Blackie with something of superstitious fear. She disliked his intense blackness, and his yellow-green eyes, and his sudden quiet way of appearing where he was least expected. She looked down at him, lying on Janet's lap, and shook her head.

"He'll come till a bad end," she reiterated. "Mark my word."

Janet smoothed his shiny, satin coat. "You mustn't be so bold and greedy, Blackie," she admonished gently. "Now, listen to Janet, and promise to be good." Blackie purred loudly, in response, and Janet looked up hopefully. "There, did you hear him, Kirsty? He's promised. He says he'll be good. He promised just now."

But evidently Blackie had given his word lightly; for in the days following there was no visible improvement in his conduct. He continued in his evil ways. He leaped upon the kitchen table; he stole from the cellar; he snatched from Pepper and the hens; he went on marauding expeditions to the neighbours; and in every way proved himself a great trial to Janet. Matters grew so serious that she took to praying about him.

"Nellie says it's not right to pray about a cat," she said

to her mother. "But I don't know what else to do. If he doesn't be good soon Kirsty'll do something to him; and I'd rather the Lord would attend to Blackie than Kirsty," she added, feeling with the great commander of the "Revenge" that it was better to fall into the hands of God than into the hands of Spain.

And then Janet's prayer was answered in a very strange manner. It happened on the last night of October, which was Janet's birthday. For she had arrived in the world

"Upon that night, when Fairies light
On Cassilis Downans dance."

and Mr. Balfour said the date was very appropriate, and explained many things about her.

On this birthday, Nellie was invited to supper; and with Mr. Balfour's help they had a very gay time indeed. They popped corn, and ducked for apples, and played hide-and-seek all over the house, until Kirsty declared they were driving her clean daft; and that wild young callant was far from acting like a minister of the gospel.

At eight o'clock Mr. Balfour left for a meeting at the church, and took Nellie to her home when he went. Janet went into the kitchen to help Kirsty put away and tidy up after the fun. Blackie followed them to and fro, purring loudly, and rubbing insinuatingly against their skirts, his tail on high like a banner, his head raised coaxingly. He was so annoying to Kirsty that, to Janet's dismay, she snatched him up, and sent him flying out into the cold dark world; and shut the door on him with an emphatic bang.

Janet moved about softly, feeling as if she were the one to blame. The night was mild, and Kirsty had left the window open; and the little girl peered out into the dark garden in the hope that she might discern the beloved figure; but Blackie was invisible on a dark night.

Kirsty went to the cellar to put away the milk and butter; and Janet stood holding the lamp for her and talking over Hallowe'en, and all the strange tales associated

with it. She had many questions to ask concerning warlocks, and witches, and fairies, and their magic spells; and though Kirsty scoffed, she could not be made to state that there were really no such things.

"Huh!" she remarked, when Janet pressed the question. "It's only thae ignorant Irish that believe sic like things. But there's been queer things happen in the old country that my mother would be telling me; and they happened on Hallow Eve night, too. You can't tell," she added, in a voice that made a chill go up Janet's spine. "You never can tell."

Meanwhile Blackie was very busy. After his expulsion from the kitchen he had reconnoitred, and found that the window was open; and well he knew that the table stood right against it. It was dark in the kitchen now, just as he wanted it. One silent leap to the old bench against the kitchen wall, another to the window ledge, and he stepped noiselessly onto the table. An empty salmon can stood right under his nose; and, oh, how delicious was the smell of that fish, straight from a British Columbia river. Blackie grew excited over the delightful aroma. Kirsty generally scraped a dish so that there was not a morsel left for a poor cat; but her sharp eyes had missed just a few titbits this time, in the bottom of the can. Blackie circled round it. He reached in his paw, but it was no use. He tried to shove his head in, but, alas, the opening was too small, and the jagged edges hurt. He grew desperate; he simply must have that bit of salmon, and there was so little time.

Footsteps were approaching; the next moment the door opened; the light of the lamp streamed in, and there were Janet and Kirsty! Blackie made a last frantic attempt to squeeze his head into the can, unmindful of the pain in the thought of the reward.

Janet uttered a dismayed scream; and Kirsty added a shout,—“Hish! Scat! Oot o’ that, ye villain!” And then the queerest thing happened, something that, even with the combined testimony of the two witnesses, could never be

quite credited. But what Janet and Kirsty saw, and what they both testified to solemnly, was that Blackie seized the big salmon can in both his paws, and leaped with it out of the window.

Janet gave a shill squeal of astonishment; and Kirsty put down the lamp and raising her hands above her head ejaculated, "The good Lord preserve us."

They ran to the door and looked out into the yard, half expecting to see Blackie carrying the can through the orchard. But it was too dark to see anything; so Kirsty lit the lantern and they went out on a cat hunt; Janet hanging on to Kirsty's skirts, fearing she knew not what. But though they looked in every corner, there was no Blackie, and no salmon can. They searched under the window; they searched the yard; and the orchard, even the woodshed, where he might be supposed to have carried his plunder. But both the cat and the can had vanished. Kirsty came back into the kitchen and stared at the table as though she half expected that her sight had deceived her, and that she would see the salmon can standing there after all. Then she muttered something to herself about "warlocks and witches."

Janet rushed to her mother with the alarming news. Blackie had vanished into the night. That itself was not such an astonishing thing; for he had a bad habit of vanishing into the night, and being very noisy about it afterwards, too; but he had taken the salmon can, and it had vanished with him! Mrs. Meldrum followed the little girl's tumultuous race back to the kitchen; and listened in some amusement to the excited recital. Kirsty was strangely silent and non-committal. "But Blackie's only run away down the garden, dear," said her mother tolerantly.

"But the salmon can, Mother! It's gone with him. He took it in his paws. Kirsty and I saw him."

"He's knocked it off the window into the garden. You'll find it under the bench."

"Aye, likely," said Kirsty darkly. "It'll be ill work findin' it, or I'm mistaken."

Mr. Balfour came in shortly from his meeting; and, hearing the commotion, came out to the kitchen to see what was the matter. He laughed so hard that Janet was disposed to see the funny side of the affair herself. He took the lantern, and searched the back garden for the salmon can; but came back looking puzzled. "I always knew Blackie was an unusually hungry cat," he said. "But I didn't think he'd swallow a tin salmon can. But it seems that's what he's done!"

The morning revealed signs of many pranks played by the Hallowe'en witches. Gates were gone; jack-o'-lanterns were hung upon doors; and the ghastly remains of ghosts lingered in fence-corners. But nowhere was there any sign of Blackie or his Hallowe'en trick.

Janet was up early, and throwing on her coat, she ran out into the frosty garden to look for her lost pet. She went up and down the orchard and garden, and even out into the pasture-field behind the church, calling him. Pepper went with her, barking, and running to and fro excitedly. And every few minutes he would stop short, and take to digging frantically in the earth, sniffing as though he were sure Blackie had hidden himself and the can underground.

"You foolish doggie," admonished Janet. "Blackie isn't down there, Pepper. I think the witches must have run away with him."

Mr. Balfour saw the worried little searcher from his bedroom window; and descended, to see if he could be of any help. He had to admit that there was something very queer about the disappearance. It was remarkable that even so accomplished a thief as Blackie could make away with something the size of a salmon can. He began to lean towards Pepper's theory that the cat had buried his booty.

"Maybe Blackie turned into a witch, last night, Janet," he suggested, "and the salmon can into a broom stick; and we'll see him riding over the church tower some dark, stormy night."

Janet tried to smile, but failed. Her loss was too great. Besides, she had always had suspicions that Mr. Balfour

did not love Blackie very passionately. He admitted that he liked dogs better than cats.

She was sure of deep sympathy in one person, however; and, as soon as breakfast was over, she gained a reluctant permission from her mother to run over to the Kellys and see if Bud knew anything of the truant. She tore down the garden path, through the hole in the fence, around behind the church, and burst tumultuously into the Kelly woodshed. The Kellys had had a grand celebration the night before; and breakfast was late. Tim was in the woodshed, chopping some kindling for the morning's fire, and Bud was just emerging from the back door to take his turn at the little tin washbasin beside the pump.

Janet gathered them about her in the kitchen; and told the calamity that had befallen. They clustered around her breathless, Mrs. Kelly holding up amazed hands, covered with dough from the bread she was mixing.

Janet told her story graphically. He vanished, she declared. That's what he did; just like a ghost! And the salmon can had vanished too!

Bud, and Tim, and Rosie, and even little Jimsey, all followed Janet back to the scene of the tragedy; but though they searched till they were all late for school, they had no reward for their labours, except an extra half-hour's work after four o'clock.

They spread the sad news at school; and a search through the village was instituted. Even Old Watty Sinclair became interested in the case, when Janet brought the news with his "Globe"; and he promised to keep a sharp ear for Blackie's night song, should he happen anywhere near the Old Bradley House.

But the days went by and Blackie did not return, and the mystery deepened. His loss was a tragedy to Janet; and the manner of his disappearing was alarming. She developed an entirely new set of nerves; and was afraid to go down the garden path alone after darkness had fallen; and she fell into the habit of creeping into her mother's bed at night, in terror of the dread something that might

snatch her through the window, the way Blackie had been snatched.

Mrs. Meldrum felt that Janet's mind was dwelling too long upon the subject; and held long and exhaustive arguments with her over it, from all of which Janet rather came out victorious.

But Mr. Balfour saw that the little girl was still suffering, not only from grief at the loss of her playmate, but from vague and harmful fears; and he set himself to relieve the situation.

He first tried some amateur detective work. He had a suspicion that Kirsty knew more of the tragedy than she would confess; but on questioning, he found he had wronged her.

"Eh, eh, Mr. Balfour," she declared, "I didn't like the crater; but I jist wish he'd come back; and that's the truth. It's fearsome the way he was took; an' that's all about it. I always said he was no canny; aye, aye, no canny."

He next interviewed the Kelly boys in the back pasture, whither he often went on a Saturday morning with Janet, to join the ball game. He was soon equally convinced of their innocence. Even Tim Kelly, he found, was under Janet's spell; and was incapable of playing a Hallowe'en trick on anything belonging to her.

So he took Janet into the study one evening, and told her that she must make Blackie's disappearance an occasion for singing in her heart. "Special occasions require special music," he reminded her. "Remember how the choir practised for the anniversary. And if you stop your silent singing while Blackie's away, you may forget how to sing altogether; and think what a calamity that would be."

Janet smiled up at him from where she sat by the fire, with Pepper lying by her side, but no pussy on her lap. It was not a very gay smile, however.

"Suppose we start by singing out loud," he said. "Let's try 'Hammer and Tongs.'"

Mr. Balfour often sang this old sea song, and insisted upon Janet singing it with him. For, he explained, it had

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no tune anyway, and the singer only had to use the words and make a great deal of noise. So they were soon singing at the tops of their voices.

"Odds, bobs, hammer and tongs,
Long as I've been to sea,
I've fought 'gainst every odds,
And I've gained the victoree!"

And they made such a noise that Kirsty heard it in the kitchen; and, in spite of her growing regard for the young minister, she felt some misgivings.

When the ten verses of the old chantey were finished, with a great deal of accompanying "Heave-Hos," and "Pull-away-my-lads," Mr. Balfour once more grappled with the sore subject of Blackie.

"Let's have a song about Blackie going away," he suggested. "I know you could make up one if you tried. You run off to your room and make up a verse for us to sing. See that the lines rhyme at the end, and then we'll sing it together without a tune. Tunes are a great bother anyway."

Janet looked up at him with shining eyes. "Oh, Mr. Balfour," she declared. "I do think you are the most wonderfulest inventor!"

She dashed off to her own room; and he took down the little flag and softly closed the door. He was so busy for the next half hour that he forgot all about the affair, until he opened the door and almost stumbled over the little poetess. She was sitting patiently on a stool, right in the doorway, waiting for him, with a sheet of foolscap spread out on her lap. Only three lines had been written; and the would-be authoress was chewing her pencil desperately.

"There's something wrong with it," she declared, looking up at him appealingly. "There doesn't seem to be any word in the world that will rhyme with Blackie."

Mr. Balfour was going out; but he sat down again to deal with this serious problem. "Let me see, now," he mused. "Blackie; what word would rhyme with Blackie? What have you written?"

She handed him her paper and he read aloud:

"I had a pussy-cat so dear,
I called him Blackie,
But something happened to him very queer."

"That's splendid so far!" he cried.

"But I can't make up the next line until I get the last word," said Janet. "And I can't think of anything to rhyme with Blackie."

"I can't either, just now—except lackey."

"Lackey? What's that?"

"A servant. Do you think you could work that in?"

"I don't know. Blackie wasn't a bit like a servant. He never wanted to do anything but lie beside the fire."

"That's so; he was too much the aristocrat to be called a lackey. Now, let's think again."

"I know one word," said Janet hesitatingly, "but I'm afraid Mother wouldn't like it. It's not a very nice word." She glanced at him from under her long lashes. "Bud's father says it," she added, when he looked at her encouragingly. "He always says when he comes into the house, he says——" Her voice fell to a whisper. "He says, 'By cracky, why can't you have a fellow's supper ready?' It's not very nice, I'm afraid, but it's a lovely rhyme."

Mr. Balfour did not seem to think it would be so very dreadful, considering the poverty of their vocabulary; but he managed to do without it by finishing her poem with a manufactured word:

"I had a pussy-cat so dear,
I called him Blackie,
But something happened to him very queer,
And now he won't come backie!"

Janet laughed aloud at this; and Mr. Balfour was so much encouraged that he wrote a poem himself; dashing it off, as he stood by his desk, without even stopping to think, Janet believed.

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"There once was a pussy, named Blackie,
Who wasn't a bit like a lackey,
For on a dark night
He eloped away, quite,
With a big can of salmon, by Cracky!"

And when Mr. Balfour sang it to the tune of a funny old college song, that did not suit it in the least, Janet went into screams of laughter.

It proved to be great fun, this writing songs and singing them; and he left her struggling with a second stanza for his poem; and singing the first one, strictly according to arrangement, without a tune.

With the help of many such rhymes, Janet was able to take up her silent singing once more.

"I'm really feeling awfully bad about Blackie, yet," she said to her mother, half apologising for her gaiety, "but I'm trying to sing about him down in my stomach; even when I feel the worst."

Her mother smiled indulgently, and patted the little trowsled head lovingly. "What would I do without my little silent singer?" she asked, and went on with her work.

Although Janet had regained her accustomed spirits, Hugh Balfour noticed that, as soon as she came home from school, she ran rown through the orchard and garden, calling her lost pet's name. Sometimes there was a very plaintive note in the call; but she always came back skipping.

On a cold, stormy Saturday, nearly two weeks after Blackie's disappearance, the family were sitting at their dinner, when Janet glanced through the window that commanded a view of the front lawn. She gave a cry of delight and astonishment.

"Why, there's Mr. Watty! And he's coming in here!"

Sure enough. It was really old Watty Sinclair, who had never stepped inside anyone's gate, except Dr. Gillespie's, since he came to Cherry Hill. He was carrying something under his arm; and as he caught sight of Janet at the window, he waved his stick at her.

Janet flew to the front door; flung it open; and ran out

to greet the old man. Mr. Balfour took one glance through the window; and he, too, left the table with scarcely time for an apology, and ran after Janet. For the bundle old Watty carried was a big, black cat! Blackie and the salmon can, too! A dreadful, thin, bedraggled Blackie it was, uttering piteous cries, that were smothered in the strange head-dress he wore. For there he was, like an old Knight caught in his own helmet,—a veritable skeleton in armor. The mystery was explained; Blackie had stuck his head into the salmon can, and had not been able to remove it. And thus he had been wandering about, blinded and muzzled; a solemn warning to all greedy cats; the victim of his own ungovernable appetite!

Old Watty was trembling with excitement, as he tried to explain; while Janet danced around him like a demented child.

He had found him, the old man managed to make known, blundering about one of the back sheds of the old Bradley House. How he got there no one knew; but there he must have died a prisoner had Old Watty not heard him banging about and gone to the rescue.

Mr. Balfour seized the prodigal; and, taking hold of his head-dress, wrenched it off. Blackie came out with a terrible yowl; and leaping from his rescuers, he bolted straight for the back yard, like a big black butterfly burst from a rusty cocoon. Janet dashed after him; but Blackie's period of imprisonment and starvation had so terrified him that he feared even his best friend. He shot up to his old hunting ground in the woodshed loft, and at Mr. Balfour's advice, Janet left him until such time as his nerves should grow quiet. She dragged Old Watty into the house, and made him tell the wonderful story of the rescue over and over again. He had come away in such a hurry he had not taken time to get his dinner; and Mrs. Meldrum made the old man sit down with the family. And so Old Watty made his first entry into a home in Cherry Hill, by way of Janet's cat.

Blackie's ruling passion soon overcame the terrors of his

exile. He crawled weakly and humbly to the back door; and was fed and petted and mourned over and rejoiced over by Janet. And how he drank! Saucer after saucer of milk disappeared, until Kirsty advised that more might injure him in his starved condition. She arranged a mat for him in a cosy corner behind the stove; and Janet put him tenderly to bed, where he immediately curled up and went to sleep.

To everyone's surprise, Kirsty actually seemed relieved at his return; and the discovery that there was nothing supernatural about his disappearance. And it was not long after that she was heard to say that yon daft buddy, Old Watty Sinclair, seemed to be some use in the world, after all.

CHAPTER XIII

OLD WATTY MAKES A DISCORD

FROM that day of Blackie's return a change seemed to come over Old Watty. Janet had brought the outside world to him; and now Janet's cat had brought him to the outside world again. He began to limp to a neighbour's occasionally; quite often to the Manse; and a few Sundays after Blackie's rescue, he put on his best clothes, and came hobbling up to church. And until the snow held him a prisoner in his old ruined fortress, he was there in the back seat every Sunday; and he always lingered at the door until Janet darted back for a word with him before he left.

"You are a real, little missionary," Mr. Balfour said to her one morning, as they walked home from church, after saying good-bye to Old Watty at the door.

"A missionary?" asked Janet in surprised delight. "But a missionary has to go away to China, or some place far away."

"Not at all. There are plenty of missionaries who never go away from their own doorstep."

Old Gibbie Gibson's John, who intended to be a minister like Mr. Balfour some day, and who was studying in the High School in Algonquin, was walking on the other side of Janet.

"Speaking of missionaries, Mr. Balfour," he said. "Your old friend Cameron told me last week that you joined the Student Volunteers at college. Did you?"

Mr. Balfour nodded. Janet glanced up at him swiftly, and saw that his eyes were shining. "Yes, I want just one

more year; and then I hope to go to the Foreign field, somewhere; if they'll take me."

She did not hear the rest of the conversation, so anxious was she to ask what was meant by Student Volunteers. John Gibbie came in for dinner; and there was no opportunity at the table; for her mother's prohibitive eye was constantly turned in her direction, when there was company at the table.

She waited in a fever of impatience till the meal was over; and just as they were going upstairs to the study, she caught Mr. Balfour's hand and drew him aside.

"Please, please, Mr. Balfour, won't you tell me what a Student Volunteer is? And how are you one? Is it like being one of the Volunteers, and wearing a red coat, like Bud's father does sometimes?"

Mr. Balfour laughed. "Not exactly," he explained. "And yet it is being a soldier; a soldier of the Cross. Some soldiers stay at home and guard their country, and others have to sail away to foreign lands and fight the enemy there. And I happen to be one of those that's been ordered away. And that means that I hope to be a missionary some day, in a heathen country."

Janet looked up at him, her eyes glowing.

"Oh, Mr. Balfour!" she burst forth. "I didn't know you were so good, and so brave!"

He laughed aloud at that. "It's neither good nor brave, little Jenny Melody; not the least bit; because I want to go; and I wouldn't be happy if I had to stay at home."

"But what will we do without you?" she asked in sudden dismay. "Oh, I don't want you to go so far away!" Then she suddenly brightened. "When I get big I'm going to be a Volunteer, too; and go wherever you go! Won't that be lovely?"

"That would be about the loveliest thing that ever happened," he declared, and then her mother came out of the dining-room, her Sabbath silk rustling softly, John Gibbie with her; and Janet had to subside. She went away to her room to change her church dress for one less liable to

accidents, wondering whether she was glad or sorry. She sat down on the floor, and laced up her school boots all criss-cross in her indecision. She had the same dreadful feeling in her heart at the thought of Mr. Balfour's going so far away as she had experienced when Daddy left for California. She was quite sure that when he went to India or China, or wherever it was he was going, she would never again be able to sing in her heart or out loud either, no matter if she had a dozen operations on her throat and ears. And yet, she was conscious of a strange feeling of joy. It was glorious to think that he was so good and so brave. She had thought him perfect before; but now he seemed to have added a sort of lustre to his perfection, that set him apart on a shelf of his own.

Janet confided her new ambition to Nellie, as they played with their dolls on Saturday afternoon in Janet's bedroom.

"I'm not going to be a singer," Nellie declared, "now that you're not, Janet. I think I'd rather be a hired girl, anyway. Hired girls always do whatever they like; they can bake cakes and have anything they like to eat."

They had just been turned out of the kitchen by Kirsty; and Janet was inclined to agree with Nellie that the servant in the house held an enviable position.

"I guess I'll be one, too, 'cause I know I'll never be able to sing like Sylvia Ward," she said, and then she suddenly remembered her great destiny.

"Oh, no, I can't; I forgot. I'm going to be a missionary."

"A missionary?" Nellie's blue eyes grew big. "Oh, Janet, don't! I don't want you to go away. And missionaries have to go away off to Africa or somewhere; and there's snakes and crocodiles always where they are, that bite you!"

Janet was slightly shaken in her resolution. "Mr. Balfour wouldn't be afraid," she said suddenly brightening. "He could shoo away the biggest crocodile that ever grew."

"Is Mr. Balfour going to be a missionary, too?"

"Yes; he's a volunteer missionary, like Bud's father, only different. And he's going away to preach the gospel

to every creature; and I promised I'd go with him when I got big."

Nellie took up Janet's best doll and began to undress it.

"Then I bet Sylvia Ward won't marry him," she remarked with uncanny wisdom.

"Who? Was she going to marry Mr. Balfour?" asked Janet, all interest.

"Imph-m-m. Marjorie says Sylvia's liked Mr. Balfour ever since she was here for the anniversary. Only she's scared he'll be a missionary; and so she won't go with him much till she finds out what he's goin' to do. I heard them talking about it one day; and Marjorie made Mother send me out of the room, just at the very best place! I think the girls are as mean as mean, Janet. They won't ever tell me a thing; and they talk and talk about things that I don't know about. Get out your Princess Patricia, and let's dress her up again."

Janet took the big doll out of the drawer. She was not particularly fond of dolls herself. They were useful to wile away a rainy afternoon, when one could not run out and play; but her active body and mind required something with more life. Even Leola palled when the Kellys were playing hounds and hare in the back pasture.

"Let's pretend that they're all heathens," she suggested, "and we'll preach to them."

"I think I'll be a missionary, too, Janet," Nellie said, fired to enthusiasm by Janet's sermon. "I don't think I'd mind going so very much if Mr. Balfour was with us. And it would serve Marj and Bell good and right if I went away. They'd be sorry they were so mean and whispered at night, if I went away to China and got et up by the crocodiles!"

Janet was so fascinated with the idea of being a missionary that, as a beginning, she began infusing new life into the Mission Band. This little organisation was composed of a half-dozen little girls, and Lennie Caldwell; and Janet took upon herself the heavy task of making Bud and Tim and some of the other village boys attend.

She was succeeding beyond her hopes, when the Christ-

mas holidays fell upon her and separated her from her fellows. Next to clothes, Janet's chief trouble in life was vacations. They blotted out all the stir and joy and comradeship of school; and shut her away in the old grey house beyond the church, to spend her days in loneliness.

The first day of the holidays being Monday, and wash-day, Kirsty found Janet and the washing combined too much for her nerves; and finally ordered her out of the kitchen, saying that she would drive her clean daft with her noise and her capers. Janet took her dog and her restored cat, and her troublesome self upstairs, wondering what she would do. Singing and making melody in your heart was a very fine exercise indeed, but it did not take all one's time, and what was one to do in between? There was no welcoming flag on the study door; though she could hear Mr. Balfour whistling, just on the other side of it. He seemed so happy that Janet's curiosity was aroused.

"Mr. Balfour's been whistling all morning," she said, pausing at the door of her mother's room where the sewing machine was whirring. "I guess he wouldn't be so happy if he had holidays. Mother, don't you think holidays are a mistake?"

Her mother was in the midst of a rather intricate piece of sewing—an attempt to make a dress for Janet out of an old skirt of her own—and she answered absently, "Yes, dear, I suppose so."

"Poor Daddy must be awfully tired of them. He's had nearly four months of them now. When I get big maybe I'll teach school, like Miss Mitchell, before I go to be a missionary; and if I do I won't ever send the boys and girls away from school. I'll just stay there all the time and have a good time with them."

Her mother smiled at this, but she did not seem to take much interest in the subject; so Janet ran to her own room to take refuge in writing a long letter to her father, commiserating him upon the dreary length of his holidays. But the letter did not take very long; and only a very small part of the day was used up. Even Leola could not be roused

to be entertaining. Since her eleventh birthday, Janet had been calling less and less upon Leola as a companion.

The afternoon brought relief. It was a bitterly cold day, and Mrs. Meldrum was forced to admit that Old Watty would not be able to get out for his paper; so Janet was permitted to take it to him.

"Please, Mother, let me call and see if Bud's cold's better," she pleaded, as she rapturously flung on her coat.

"I'd much rather you wouldn't, dear," said her mother, looking up from her desk. "You might catch the cold."

"Oh, no, I'm sure I won't, Mother. I promise I won't. I won't go near Bud. I'll just stand away at the other end of the room and holler at him. Please, Mother."

Janet was dragging on one rubber, balancing herself on one foot, and hopping around the room like a crazy sparrow. She looked so funny that her mother laughed aloud; and Janet knew the argument was won.

"Well, go then, darling," her mother said, unable to look stern, "but remember you must stay just a very few minutes."

Janet dashed into her bedroom, tore open the bureau drawer, and took out a carefully hoarded orange and some candy Mr. Balfour had brought her from town. She wrapped them up hurriedly in a newspaper; stuck the shapeless parcel under one arm; and, having shut Pepper in the back hall, she skipped away, as glad as a wild bird freed from its cage.

She found Bud sitting by the stove, looking better, but still with a terrible cough. Molly was baking bread; and her mother was sewing. The kitchen was in the joyous litter that it generally presented when all the children were in it. Corny rolled over on the floor, and cooed and gurgled, and was as gay and jolly as a baby could possibly be.

Since the father of the family had gone to "the Shanties," as he did every winter, meals were more erratic than ever; and, though the afternoon was half spent, the wreck of the Kelly dinner was still on the table. Its confusion was augmented by the presence of school books, coats and caps,

Mrs. Kelly's sewing, and the last family laundry, still unironed. But there was a roaring fire in the stove; and now that the father of the family was safely removed for the winter, everybody seemed happy. Janet gave Corny the orange, setting him shouting with glee; and, completely forgetting her promise to her mother, she rushed over to Bud, and pressed the candy into his hot little hands.

"Come on out with me and Nellie, Rosie, will you?" she asked. "We're going to take Mr. Watty his paper."

Rosie, who was making a vague attempt to clear the table, shook her tousled head in deep disappointment.

"She can't go to-day, Jinit," said Mrs. Kelly. "Rosie's got no coat, poor child, that she hasn't. But I'm makin' over Molly's for her now; and it'll be ready agin to-morrow."

"And I'm to wear Ma's old one," said Molly, cheerfully. "And Ma's not goin' out this winter anyway; but if she does she's goin' to wear her shawl."

Janet went away alone, very slowly. Something was coming up into her throat and threatening to choke her. It hurt dreadfully, away down in the place where she wanted to sing, to think of Mrs. Kelly with only her old shawl for the winter; of Molly wearing her mother's old coat at school, where the big girls like Aggie Wright were sure to laugh; and of Rosie with no coat at all for the present. And Janet herself had the warm heavy cloth coat she was wearing; and at home, in the closet, hung a navy blue velvet one, that Aunt Flora had sent on her last birthday. She ran swiftly down the street, the bitter wind making little icicles of the tears she was winking desperately away.

Nellie spied Janet from the front window and came running to throw open the door. The two little girls rushed into each other's arms. They had not seen each other for fully twenty-four hours.

"Oh, goody! I'd love to go to Mr. Watty's!" cried Nellie when she heard Janet's errand. "Come on in. Who d'you suppose is here, Janet?"

"Miss Lena?" asked Janet eagerly. "Imph-n-n; but somebody else, too. Oh, you'd never guess!"

Janet did not guess, for it was almost too good to be true. When Nellie led her into the living-room, there, before the open grate fire, sat the lovely Miss Sylvia Ward, who had sung so sweetly at the anniversary. She was just as beautiful and bright and delightful as she had been on her last visit. And she wore the most wonderful dress, Janet was sure, that anyone in the world had ever seen. It was a soft, transparent, golden-brown, that looked like amber in the firelight; and her fluffy hair, piled high on her pretty head, was a deeper, darker, and richer gold. She sat in a low rocking-chair, with her little feet on the hearth; with Marjorie and Mrs. Gillespie on one side of her, and Miss Lena on the other; and Fred Gillespie, Nellie's big brother, was lolling on the sofa staring at her.

Nellie went upstairs to get ready; and Janet seated herself on the sofa beside Fred; and joined him in gazing admiringly at the vision before the fire.

"Poor old Uncle Watty!" the vision said, laughing. "You're surely not lending him the 'Globe' yet! Lena, why doesn't the clan Sinclair take up a collection, and give the poor old cross patch a life's subscription?"

"He wouldn't take it," sighed Lena.

"Not on your life!" cried Fred. "You don't know your Uncle Watty, Sylvia. Why, he'd sooner take the 'Mail' from us than soil his hands by taking the 'Globe' from his relations."

"I'd like to send him the 'Mail' sometime," cried Sylvia. "If I could be there to see his reception of a Tory newspaper. I've half a mind to send him a year's subscription for Christmas."

"He'd burn the post-office down," prophesied Fred. "Say, though, wouldn't it be jolly-o to send the old codger the 'Mail' some day, just by mistake; and see if the roof of the Bradley House would blow off."

Sylvia Ward suddenly sat up very straight; and her eyes shone a deeper golden brown than her dress.

"Have you yesterday's 'Mail'?" she asked.

"I'm ashamed to say Father takes it," admitted Fred. "But I hope you'll understand that it's only because he feels it his duty to watch the unprincipled wretches who—Hello, Sylvie, where are you going?"

For Sylvia had jumped up; and, catching Marjorie by the hand, danced her away out into the dining-room.

There was a burst of laughter, as soon as they had disappeared; and Marjorie's voice cried, "Oh, Sylvie! You're just as bad as ever!" Then Marjorie's head was popped in at the door, her face crimson with laughter. "Fred! Lena!" she called. "Come here—quick!"

Fred leaped to his feet, and the two ran into the dining-room, and Janet could hear more laughter. It was all very mysterious, though very delightful, and she laughed too, just because laughter was always infectious. Mrs. Gillespie glanced indulgently towards the dining-room door, and shook her head. "Children, what mischief are you up to now?" she asked. But as this was merely a rhetorical question, which no one was expected to answer, no one paid any attention; and the laughter grew louder.

Marjorie's head was popped in again. "Bell, bring Mother's scissors and come here, quick!" Isabel, a tall girl home from High School for the holidays, snatched the scissors from her mother's basket; and Fred dashed out of the dining-room and ran upstairs, his sister shouting after him that the paste was on Father's desk, or else in the bath-room. The Gillespie home, especially in holiday time, was a gay, riotous, untidy place. No one knew where anything was; and the whole family was always hunting someone's hat or the scissors or the screw-driver or the doctor's gloves.

Fred shortly appeared at the head of the stair, bawling that the paste was not in the bath-room, nor on his father's desk; and Kitty was despatched to find it; while Janet heard Miss Lena say, "Oh, I think it is too bad!" Mrs. Gillespie sat and stitched away happily, unheeding. She was always like a placid and sun-bathed rock in the maelstrom of her family's comings and goings.

She became interested when her husband came bustling into the room. Dr. Gillespie was a big, stout, blustering man. He was a kind, indulgent father; but he was subject to bursts of temper when he was worried over a patient, or in a hurry, or very busy, or tired, or hungry, or too cold, or too hot. He came tramping into the living-room, bringing with him something of the bluster of the winter storm.

"Now, Mother!" he shouted, as though Mrs. Gillespie were away at the other end of the village, instead of right in front of him, "I'll be gone an hour; and if Kit and Bell want to come with me when I get back, mind you, they've got to be ready! I won't sit in the cold waiting, while they frill and fluff themselves. It's go when I go; or stay at home altogether."

"We're all ready now," cried Isabel's indignant young voice from the top of the stairs. "Kit and I've been waiting ever since dinner for you, Daddy, so now!"

"The girls will be ready and waiting for you, dear," said his wife. "Sylvia and Lena are here," she added.

"Ready and waiting!" he repeated, buttoning up his coat hurriedly. "I think I see them, I do!" He pulled a pair of gloves from his pocket and flung them on the floor.

"Marjorie! Where are my old, fur-lined gloves? Man alive! It's cold enough to freeze the nether regions over; and here I am, driving all over the country with a pair of gloves that wouldn't keep the sun warm in August. And Fred put in that old rug, when I told him I wanted the fur one. Katherine! Isabel! Mother, where are those girls? One of you get that old fur robe out of the attic; and be quick about it. Do you hear? Where's Fred? Confound it; what's the use of a pack of women cluttering up the house, if a man can't get a hand's turn done for him? Marjorie!" He was tramping about, and shouting by this time; and Mrs. Gillespie put aside her sewing, and arose to despatch the family on their several errands.

"Sylvia and Lena are here, John," she warned again. "They are out in the dining-room."

"Well, let them stay there," he thundered. "I couldn't

find my woollen scarf this morning, and I had to drive clear to Lake Simcoe without it. There isn't a soul in this house cares a hang whether I die of pneumonia or not."

He stamped away into his office, while Isabel darted upstairs to the attic, followed by her mother, giving out instructions as to the whereabouts of the fur robe. Kitty ran to her father's room to rummage for the gloves; and Marjorie, her head held high, walked haughtily to the hall closet, and returned, holding the missing scarf at arm's length, and declaring that she had threatened to leave home before, but it was no threat this time, she was certainly going next week.

The visitors effaced themselves in the dining-room, with the exception of Janet. She knew Nellie's father very well; and was very fond of him. He had dwelt among the Stand Bys ever since he was so good and kind when she had the scarlet fever. She rather enjoyed the rush and bustle, too; and she ran up to the attic to help Isabel, and down again to assist Kitty and Nellie in their frantic search for the missing gloves.

Everything was found at last; and, the domestic storm having subsided, the Doctor sailed pleasantly into the living-room again, pulling on his warm gloves.

"Well, Janet," he cried, seeing the little girl for the first time, "I suppose you think I'm a terrible, old ogre, don't you?"

"What's an ogre?" asked Janet, pouncing upon the new word.

"An ogre is a big, cross, dreadful, roaring giant with a bad temper," he replied, his eyes twinkling. "Don't you think I'm one?"

Janet considered this. "Well, I don't know; you're not quite as big as a giant, are you?" she said at last.

That was evidently the only difference Janet could see; the Doctor laughed aloud.

"It's very refreshing to have one really truthful person in the neighbourhood," he said, for he had been the victim of Janet's frankness before.

Janet said nothing to this; she was wondering if it wouldn't be a very good thing for the doctor if he sang inside him.

"I guess I'm not such a bad old fellow, after all," he said. "My bark is worse than my bite, isn't it, Janet?" He gave her long braid a playful pull.

Janet looked up at him with a new interest. "Oh, can you bark, too, Doctor Gillespie?" she asked eagerly. "I must tell young Mrs. Gibbie Gibson."

"Why?" he asked, wonderingly.

"'Cause Mrs. Gibbie Gibson said you could growl better than their dog, Towser; but I never heard you bark. How do you do it?"

The Doctor did not look quite so happy; especially as he saw his wife's portly shoulders beginning to shake.

"The Lord Almighty must have felt like quitting when he made a human being as clever as Mrs. Gibbie Gibson, Jr.," he declared, as he tramped out of the room. "Hi, girls, got that rug yet?" And he went out into the storm, calling back that if the girls weren't ready and waiting for him the minute he drove up, he would leave them; and this was his last warning.

The house settled to its usual pleasant level, after this upheaval; the family being too accustomed to such eruptions to make any comment. Nellie came running downstairs pulling on her coat, and calling to Fred to give her the newspaper; for she and Janet must be going.

"Fred's using the 'Globe' for a few minutes, Nell," said Isabel, poking her head in mysteriously from the dining-room. "You and Janet go upstairs and play for a little while."

Nellie was indignant at the suggestion.

"There now! They've got a joke they won't tell us, Janet," she complained. "Mother, what are they doing? Where's Marjorie? Marjorie, I want in!"

She darted to the dining-room door. "Keep those kids out," came in Fred's voice from within, "or everything'll be spoiled." And the door was slammed in Nellie's face.

"Mother," cried Nellie. "What are they all doing in there? They're always having some fun they won't tell me; and I think they're mean. Mother, aw, tell me!"

Suddenly the joke appeared to melt away. Marjorie and Sylvia Ward came strolling in, and sat down before the fire again. Fred went quietly upstairs; and Lena Sinclair and Isabel were discovered talking out in the hall.

Nellie flew from one to the other, imploring them to tell her what the fun was about; but nobody seemed to know. Even Kitty appeared to have no knowledge that anything had happened. Presently Fred came strolling downstairs again and into the living-room.

"Well, Kiddies," he cried, "are you going with Old Watty's paper now?"

"Oh," cried Janet jumping up. "I 'most forgot."

"The paper's out there in the hall, Nell," he added, "and here's a dime for each of you. Get yourselves some candy at the store."

"And come right back as soon as you are through with your errand, Miss Nell," warned big sister Marjorie.

The charm of the ten cents drove away Nellie's displeasure. They found the paper, very neatly folded, contrary to custom; and, in a few minutes, she and Janet were out of the house and hurrying down the snowy walk.

They were just a little chagrined to hear renewed peals of laughter as they closed the door.

"There they go again!" gasped Nellie, as they battled with the wind. "They are always whispering and having jokes and secrets that I don't know. I listened one night and, mind you, Janet, I heard Marjorie tell Bell that she thought she'd marry that Nelson fellow that comes here. Mind you, they don't know that I know. But if they're too mean to me, I'll tell Marj's other fellow. He's Tom Gibson, and I know she wouldn't want him to know."

Janet was always in sympathy with Nellie; but she had no knowledge as to how big sisters and brothers were to be disciplined. She wondered if Mr. Balfour had any secrets from her.

"Mr. Balfour's coming to our house to tea to-night," went on Nellie, as though she had heard what Janet was thinking. "Did you know that?"

No, Janet did not know that; so evidently he did have secrets.

"They never told me that, either," went on Nellie indignantly. "Only I heard Marj ask him. She called him on the 'phone and asked him. She said she'd have him, 'cause Lena Sinclair was coming. She says Lena won't go anywhere unless she's sure Mr. Balfour's going to be there, too."

Janet felt this showed Miss Lena's good judgment. She felt just like that herself. But they were at the store steps now, and Nellie's grievances vanished again before the sight of the jars of pink raspberry drops in the window. When they arrived at the old Bradley House, Old Watty Sinclair was sitting at his window looking out eagerly upon the world of snow, anxiously awaiting the arrival of his little couriers.

"Come away, come away!" he cried joyfully, as they came storming up on the shaky old veranda, stamping the snow from their feet. "Hey, hey, and what would I be doing without my fine mail carriers, I'd like to know?"

He hobbled about them joyfully, sweeping the snow from their feet, with his old broom.

"Sit ye down, now; sit ye down, and get warmed," he cried, pulling up two old boxes in front of the stove. He brought out his unfailing bag of peppermints; and Janet and Nellie seated themselves by the fire, while the old man limped to the window with the beloved newspaper. He fairly smacked his lips as he unfolded the pages of the oracle, devoutly hoping that there would be a fiery denunciation of the rotten and immoral Tory government, which was at that present evil moment debauching his country.

"Let's eat all our candies," suggested Nellie. "If I wait till I get home there's so many to pass them to that I never get any."

She dived into her pocket and began munching happily; but Janet spread her handkerchief upon her lap and laid her raspberry drops and peppermints upon it. Then she counted them carefully, dividing them into four equal parts; one for Kirsty, one for Mr. Balfour, one for her mother, and one for herself. The three parts she put back into the little paper bag; and, before tasting her own share, she crossed the room and handed the handkerchief to Old Mr. Watty. Nellie, inspired by Janet's generosity, came forward with hers also. But the old man, while thanking them profusely, refused. He never ate any candy, except peppermints, and he had all he could eat. And then he buried himself in his paper, taking no more notice of his guests. He ran over the first page, as was his habit, and as he did so, his face fell. As he read on he uttered an occasional scoffing remark, or a grunt of disapproval. He read one article a second time, looking puzzled and very much annoyed. "Fools of reporters," he muttered. "Ought to be hung."

He turned to the editorial page; and there slowly dawned over his face a great amazement. He read on, and fairly gasped for breath. He stopped, and looked up at the top of the page. There shone the magic words "The Globe," just as they had shone upon him ever since he had learned to read. He went back and read the editorial again; and his astonishment grew.

He took off his glasses; and looked around him to steady himself, gripping the arm of his chair that the feeling of some material object might assure him that he was really in the flesh, and not in some future Tory inferno where wrong was right.

There were the walls of his little room, and the high stained and streaked ceiling; there was his stove sending out blasts of heat, with the little black iron kettle steaming noisily upon it; and there were his two little friends sitting chatting before the fire. And yet, the world must have turned upside down. For here, on the faultless page, whose words had always been to him second only to the

Scriptures, here, printed right out in shameless type, was an editorial, stating that Canada's one and only statesman, the leader of the Liberal party, was but a blind leader of the blind.

Old Watty's sight was failing; and he had a faint hope that it might be playing him a queer trick. He took hold of a corner of the old red handkerchief which he wore tied round his neck and polished his glasses, fitting them on carefully again. But no, he could not make the words any less shameful. Everything on earth had proven false. His family had turned against him; his nephew, who had been like his own son, had betrayed him; and now, the one newspaper in the country that stood for truth, and that had been his guide and mentor, had gone over to the enemy. The cause of freedom and right was forever lost!

Old Watty drew back his fist and struck the perfidious sheet a smashing blow, tearing it across the face; then, crushing the paper into a ball, he flung it upon the floor and getting vigorously to his feet, without the aid of his stick, he trampled upon the betrayer, uttering anathemas which, fortunately for the two amazed little listeners, were thundered forth in Gaelic.

Janet and Nellie had been sitting with their feet comfortably placed upon the stove damper, planning a play-house on a tremendous scale in the old Bradley House, and at the dreadful outburst they jumped up.

"What's the matter, Mr. Watty?" cried Janet in alarm. "Was there bad news in the paper?"

"Bad news!" the old man glared down at the trampled traitor. "Bad news!" he shook his fist at it.

"Take it away," he cried chokingly. "Take it away! And don't bring that vile snake's skin into my house again! Take it away! All o' them! All o' them! Don't leave one to pollute the place."

Staggering to the corner where lay a pile of papers, carefully preserved, he swept them up into his arms. He made a stride towards the stove; but seemed to realise, even in his fury, that they might bring the old Bradley

House about his head in flames. He turned to the door instead, jerked it open, and flung the newspapers out upon the wild December wind. Janet and Nellie followed them in swift dismay. They did not look back until they were away up the street, and had reached the safe distance of the bridge.

A cloud of newspapers was whirling up the street. Some of them were finding refuge in old Mrs. Murphy's veranda, as though they knew that here was the natural resting place for all discarded rubbish. As the little girls watched their airy progress Mrs. Murphy came out, her shawl over her head, and gratefully gathered them in. The Murphys were well-to-do; but it never occurred to them to take a newspaper; and the lady of the red brick house was glad to see so many apparently rained down from heaven; she needed something to fill up a new hole in the parlour window.

All the young people of the Gillespie household were watching at the front window, as the two little girls came storming up the steps.

"Oh, Freddy, there must have been somethin' awful in the paper," gasped Nellie, almost before they got indoors. "Old Watty was awful, awful mad; and he said an awful bad word!"

"And he scrunched a hole in the paper with his fist!" exclaimed Janet aghast.

"And he threw it on the floor!" reiterated Nellie shrilly.

"And he stamped on it!" Janet came in promptly with her part of the grievous responses.

"And he threw them all outdoors!" from Nellie, in a rising crescendo.

"And he said we were never, never to bring him a 'Globe' again!" they chanted in a dismal duet.

The little girls were amazed to find that, instead of bringing consternation, the report produced shouts of laughter. Fred fell back on the sofa and roared; Marjorie and Isabel screamed; and as for Sylvia Ward, she danced about and laughed till the tears rolled down her cheeks. Only

Miss Lena did not seem to see the joke; she laughed a little, but in a protesting fashion; and kept saying it was really a shame.

Janet was puzzled, and Nellie was indignant. They had just been through a very dreadful experience; and she felt they should be treated with some consideration, not laughed at.

Fred made them repeat exactly what had happened, and laughed harder the second time. And at last Lena Sinclair said with some spirit: "It wasn't kind, Sylvie, and you'll be sorry some day."

Sylvia wiped her dancing eyes. "Why, I'm the benefactress of the whole Sinclair family. It'll do him good; you'll see."

"What if he ever finds out?"

"He won't; unless you tell him."

"There's to be no tattling, remember," declared Marjorie.

"And no tattling to-night at the supper table," warned Sylvia, her finger raised.

"Oh, ho!" cried Fred. "That's the way the wind blows! Don't want to offend the cloth, eh, Sylvia?"

Sylvia Ward's cheeks took on a richer rose color.

"There'll be no need of anyone telling if you're not careful," she said. "Little pitchers have long tongues."

When Janet returned home she found Mr. Balfour in the study, the flag on the door. He was dressed to go out to supper; and was whistling happily, as he looked over a shelf of books.

She regarded him admiringly, as she spread out his share of the candy upon the desk.

"Oh, Mr. Balfour, you do look so lovely in that black coat," she burst out. "You're singing in your heart, too, aren't you?"

"Why?" he asked, laughingly.

"Oh, because your eyes shine so; and you've been so happy all day about something, haven't you?"

"How is Mr. Watty to-day," he asked hurrying to cover,

and reflecting that there was surely something uncanny about her.

This reminded Janet of the day's disastrous happening; and she related, at length, the adventure at the Bradley House.

Mr. Balfour did not understand it. He found Saturday's paper, and ran his eyes over each page, in a vain search for the paragraph that had set the old man aflame.

"He said we weren't never, never to take him the paper again!" mourned Janet, "and he was so good to me when he brought Blackie back. They all laughed at Nellie's when we went back and told them; all but Miss Lena. She said it was too bad."

But Mr. Balfour seemed to be too happy to be disturbed over the affair; and he went away to Nellie's for supper, whistling louder than ever.

CHAPTER XIV

JANET SOLVES A RIDDLE

SINCE Leola's radiance had begun to fade, Janet had been replacing her with intellectual problems in the shape of riddles. The love of these mental gymnastics took hold upon her like a disease. Every day she confronted Mr. Balfour and her mother with, "Why is such and such like something or other?" until he declared he was in danger of a nervous breakdown from excessive brain exercise.

But all Janet's riddles were not for mere recreation; and one of her hardest in the early winter days was how to make a new coat for Molly out of nothing at all. For Molly was wearing her mother's old long coat whenever she went out, and though Janet thought it looked very nice indeed, others were of a less charitable opinion. Aggie Wright buried her face in her perfumed handkerchief to stifle her laughter the moment she set her supercilious eyes upon it; and Molly suffered much anguish from her whispered criticisms.

"Nellie's mother says she'd give Molly that old one of Kitty's," Janet said, discussing the affair with her mother, "but Kitty says she doesn't want poor Molly to be wearing her old coat to school; and she says she'd rather give her her new one; only Marjorie says she's crazy."

"It would be rather hard for Molly," her mother said. "Some of the girls might be unkind enough to notice; and, besides, I don't think it would be good for Molly's father to know that the neighbours were dressing his children."

"Why wouldn't it, Mother?" queried Janet. "Isn't it good for Daddy when Aunt Flora gives me things to wear?"

But her mother was busy writing at her desk, and Janet got no answer.

"I do wish Molly had a coat," Janet went on, talking aloud to herself. "And I do wish she had a new dress; and Rosie, too. Mother, does a new dress cost very much? I wish Molly had a pink silk dress trimmed with lace, like the one Aggie Wright has. Nellie says that Aggie's mother won't let her wear that dress any more; 'cause she wore it to school without asking. She might as well give it to Molly, then. She's thin, and the buttons wouldn't fly off every time she sneezed. Don't you think so, mother?"

"Y-e-s, dear," said her mother absently, her eyes following her pen. "Run and wash your hands and face before tea, now dear; and then you must practise your scales; you only gave them a few minutes this morning."

Janet went off with one of her loud sighs that was almost a groan. Early in the winter she had started taking music lessons from Martha Beckett; and though it was holidays her mother insisted upon an hour's practise every day. Janet found practising scales almost as toilsome as hemming a towel.

"It seems such a pity," she explained to Mr. Balfour, "that Mother will let me play, but she won't let me sing. Because I can sing without any lessons; I can sing without even trying; but I'm having an awful time learning to play."

But the music lessons helped to tide her over the dangerous time of holidays; and when she grew too insistent as to plans for getting a school coat for Molly Kelly, her mother found the piano very convenient as a relief.

But when Janet set her mind to solve a riddle she generally succeeded; and she managed to find a coat for Molly.

The most joyous sport of winter, and the one that appealed most to Janet, was hanging on to the big sleighs that came jingling through the village on their way to and from town. Mrs. Meldrum did not quite approve of this method of travel; and when she was at home she gen-

erally put her ban upon it. But one day when she was away at a convention in Algonquin, Janet and Bud went out for a whole riotous afternoon's riding up and down the public highway. It was Bud's first day out after his cold, and Janet loaned him her scarf to keep the snow from going down his thin little neck. They were not alone very long. Like the snowman they had made in the morning, by rolling a ball across the field, they gathered to themselves everything they touched; till finally Lennie, Nellie, Susie Beckett, and all the rest of the Kellys had joined them.

They had gone far out into the country on a slow-moving wood sleigh, and were coming sweeping back to the village on Young Gibbie Gibson's empty "Bobs," when a smart cutter drove up behind the yelling, singing little crowd. It was driven by young Sam Sinclair, and when Janet saw Miss Lena's brother, she waved her red mitten at him joyously.

"Hurrah back here, and ride with me, Janet!" he shouted; and with a scream of joy, Janet fairly tumbled off her perch and into the deep snow by the side of the road. Molly gave a cry of alarm, and jumped after her; and the young man stopped and bundled them both under his warm fur robes.

The sleigh and the cutter ran a mad race down the road, the occupants of each yelling defiance at the other. When they came to the Sinclair gate, instead of transferring his passengers to the sleigh, Sam whirled into the lane and up toward the house, followed by the envious shrieks of the crowd, that were being dragged back to the village.

Molly was half-pleased, half-afraid; but Janet was filled with delight, when Sam swung them out of the cutter onto the side veranda.

"Hi, Lena!" he shouted. "Here's two hired girls I brought you from town. They'll do the washin' and milkin' for you!"

Miss Lena came running out in delighted surprise; and the two little visitors were brought into the big warm par-

lour. Mrs. Sinclair, stout and motherly, sat on one side of the roaring stove, knitting; and on the other side, deep in an easy chair, sat Sylvia Ward reading a book. She wore a soft blue dress, and looked prettier than ever.

"Come away, children!" cried Mrs. Sinclair heartily. "Eh, eh, and it's little Janet; and Tom Kelly's girl!"

Molly was shivering; and as Mrs. Sinclair drew off the little girl's thin coat her kind eyes were full of pity.

"Dearie me, ye're cold, lassie!" she cried, rubbing Molly's blue hands. "Get them a drink o' hot peppermint, Lena." And then Miss Lena made a lovely suggestion.

"I wonder if you two girlyies couldn't stay and have supper with us, Janet? I've half a mind to telephone down and ask Kirsty."

"I'll telephone right now," interrupted Miss Sylvia, kindly. She jumped up and danced away out into the hall where the telephone hung, and closed the door carefully behind her.

She was gone a long time; and they could hear the musical sound of her laughing voice through the door. When she came back her cheeks were very pink, and her eyes very bright. Janet stared at her in frank admiration.

"Mr. Balfour came to the 'phone; and he says you may stay, Janet," she said, "and we're to take you home when we go down to the meeting."

"Did he say he'd send word to Molly's mother?" asked Miss Lena.

"Molly? Oh, I forgot!" Miss Sylvia burst out laughing, "and Mr. Balfour was just going out, too. Lena, you go and call up Marjorie. She'll send word over."

Miss Lena went slowly out to the telephone; and the two little girls were established as guests for the evening. To Janet a visit to Miss Lena's was always a delight; and to poor Molly the big well-furnished farm house was like a palace, and Sylvia Ward its fairy princess.

Miss Lena let them come out to the kitchen with her when she went to get the supper ready. They were running to and fro, helping to set the table, when Sam came

in. "Hey, there! Ain't my two hired girls a fine team?" he cried, tumbling an armful of wood into the big wood-box behind the stove. "What d'ye think we ought to pay 'em, Dad?"

Mr. Sinclair, who was sitting smoking and reading, with his stockinged feet on the damper of the stove, said, without looking up from his newspaper, that he'd pay them anything they asked if they'd just keep his pipe filled, and a good warm fire in the kitchen.

Molly grew radiant over all this flattery; and Janet's spirits became riotous. They ran down to the big cellar, and into the pantry and cupboard, bringing out all sorts of delightful pies and cakes and jams. Then Sylvia came out from the parlour; and immediately the noise and fun were redoubled. Sam joined in the fun; and they all chased each other around the stove and the table, and had such a good time that Molly forgot to be shy and laughed as loud as anybody.

Janet had always admired Miss Lena's beautiful cousin; but only from a distance. Now she was quite ready to put her next to Miss Lena in her cupboard of affection. She sat between Janet and Molly at the table, and made everybody laugh so hard, imitating the old professor who gave her music lessons, that Miss Lena's father exclaimed:—

"Eh, Sylvie, Sylvie! You're just such another scalawag as your mother was before you! How do we get along without you?"

There was a young people's meeting in the church that evening; and, all too soon, Sam brought the cutter round to take them to the village. As they went upstairs to prepare for the drive, Sylvia Ward put her arm around Janet; and Janet put her arm around Sylvia, as if they had both just turned eleven. Molly's coat was hanging by the stove in the hall; and by the time they reached Sylvia's bedroom, Janet had confided to her all her worries over that coat.

"The girls are sure to laugh at it when she starts to school," mourned Janet. "Oh, Miss Sylvia, don't you think clothes are a dreadful bother?"

"Well, they are; and yet they're a great comfort, too, little Janet," laughed Miss Sylvia. "Poor Molly! I wonder,—Do you know, Janet, I believe I've got a coat. Come here and see if this would do!"

She dived into the closet which was fairly crammed with dresses. Janet stood and looked in amazement, while the young lady flung one pretty gown after another upon the bed.

"Oh, it must be dreadful to have so many dresses to take care of," she cried sympathetically.

Miss Sylvia came out of the deluge of dresses holding up a beautiful, long soft coat of navy-blue cloth, with a pretty collar of brown fur.

"Bless your queer little heart!" she cried. "I never had half enough dresses in my life. Look, Janet, I wonder if this coat were shortened would it fit Molly? It's too small for me, and I'm dying to be rid of it anyway."

Janet was speechless. She could only hop up and down on one foot and gasp; and Sylvia laughed at her till she had to sit down on the bed; and Molly and Miss Lena came running down the hall to see what all the fun was about.

And then it was Molly's turn to be dumb with joy. When the coat was slipped over her thin little shoulders, and the fur collar buttoned snugly around her throat; and when Miss Lena had explained how she would take it in here, and shorten the sleeves there, Molly could only stand and stare, her big eyes growing bigger and brighter; while Janet, who had quite recovered her voice, capered about her fairly shouting.

That was the beginning of new days for Molly. Miss Lena had noticed with surprise how deftly the little Kelly girl had handled everything in the kitchen; and how neatly she had done her work. And the next day she went to

Mrs. Kelly and asked that Molly might come out to the farm and help her every Saturday, and on holidays, and she would pay her enough in advance to buy new school dresses for both her and Rosie.

With Molly's coat off her mind Janet was immediately on the lookout for someone else who needed more music in life. She sometimes wondered if Mr. Balfour was always able to sing and make melody in his heart; for after the Christmas holidays were over, he did not run upstairs two steps at a time, nor whistle so much. To be sure he was home a great deal more than he had been, much to Janet's satisfaction; and they had some merry evenings propounding riddles by the study fire. He was such a wonderful guesser that Janet was lost in admiration of his mental agility.

"Oh, Mr. Balfour, you're so clever," she declared. "I don't believe there's a riddle living that you can't guess."

To her surprise he heaved a sigh. "Ah, there's a very big one that's bothering me just now, little Janet," he said, gazing into the fire, "and I'm afraid I won't be clever enough to find the answer."

"Oh, tell me. Perhaps I could help you guess it," she cried.

He smiled; but it was a rather sad sort of smile, Janet thought. "You do help me, every day, dear," he said. "But this is a riddle that's too big for your little head. By the way, Blackie's been behaving quite respectably lately, hasn't he?" He was successful in diverting her attention. Janet forgot about the Big Riddle in her eagerness to report Blackie's steadily improved conduct.

But though Blackie was quite respectable now, and Molly and Rosie were as nicely dressed at school as anyone could wish; Janet's third big Riddle, Mr. Watty, remained stubborn and unsolvable.

All through the long winter, she tried to bring him to a state of mind that would make singing again possible. She always waved her hand at him as she passed the old

Bradley House on her way to and from school. She even ran in occasionally to ask how he was, and to enquire if the ban had not yet been taken off the newspaper. But though he seemed very glad to see her, and always enquired for Blackie, and never failed to produce the peppermint bag, he still refused to accept the offer of the treacherous paper that had ended all his hopes for his country. His own familiar friend had turned against him. Canada's last prop had given way. And Old Watty was sitting under his juniper tree declaring that everyone had bowed the knee to the Tories and he alone remained.

"I guess he can't sing in his heart any more," remarked Janet one Saturday, returning from a visit to the juniper tree. It was a bitter February day and she had found him trying to fry some pork for his dinner, over a stove that smoked, and green wood that refused to burn.

"I don't think his dinner was very nice," she added pensively, looking at the delicious meat pie Kirsty had concocted. "I guess it's hard to sing away down in your stomach when there's nothing there but emptiness."

"Janet, *child!*" exclaimed her mother, "what very strange expressions you make use of. It seems very peculiar," she added turning to Mr. Balfour, "that Mrs. Tom Sinclair can't do something about it." In her practical efficient way, Mrs. Meldrum would have taken Old Watty and put him into his proper place; just as she would tidy up a room.

"He doesn't like the things Tom's Woman gives him to eat," said Janet, "so I guess he'd rather do his own cooking." She attacked her own dinner with much zest.

"Janet, you mustn't speak of Mrs. Thomas Sinclair in that fashion. It's not polite. Sit up straight at the table, dear."

"But Mr. Watty always calls her 'Tom's Woman,' Mother, and he's always polite. He says she's a smart buddy, especially with her tongue; but he'll have to eat something he doesn't like if he goes to live with her."

"It's that potato salad," explained Mrs. Meldrum to the amused young man. "How unreasonable of the poor old fellow."

"No, it isn't the salad, Mother," said Janet, suspending operations with her fork. "He told me the other day. It's something else that Tom's Wom—I mean Mrs. Sinclair makes him eat; some kind of pie he said he'd have to eat every day if he went home."

"Some kind of pie?" asked her mother. "Don't eat so fast, Janet."

"Was it humble pie?" asked Mr. Balfour, who, under his daily training in riddles, was becoming a wonder at guessing.

Janet cast him one of her appreciative glances that said plainly what a perfect success she considered him. "Yes, that's what it was; Humble pie. What's Humble Pie, Mr. Balfour? Kirsty doesn't ever make it for us, does she?"

Here her mother laughed and said that little girls must not talk so much at the table. She must eat her dinner for it would soon be time she was getting at her practice. Janet's tongue being stopped, her brain went all the harder; and impressed the mystery of Humble Pie more surely upon her memory. She resolved that she would find out that very day what it was; and when she met Tom's Woman she would ask her to please stop baking it, so that Mr. Watty could come home and live in peace. Kirsty, she knew, would be able to tell her all about any kind of pie that was ever made. But though she was successful later in learning the unpleasant ingredients that went into the making of Humble Pie, she changed her mind about speaking to Tom's Woman about it; and poor Old Watty was still left to cook his meals alone.

Mr. Balfour called on him many times. He respected the old man's pride and dared not offer any material help. But he split the kindling wood for him; and piled his wood-box full; and did many another kind act to make the exile comfortable. He even dared to suggest that the

"Globe" had evidently departed from its evil ways and might now be read with impunity; but was met with such a storm of invective against it that he desisted; and the old man was left without reading matter through the long cold winter.

CHAPTER XV

A SECOND RIDDLE SOLVED

THE long winter came to an end at last. It was a longer winter to Hugh Balfour than anyone guessed; for all through it, he had been counting the days until Easter; the nearest time when people could come back holidaying to Cherry Hill.

There had been so much snow that everyone said there would certainly be floods when it began to melt in the spring. But Mother Nature had her own efficient way of doing things; and, when people were prophesying ill, suddenly, the snow was gone. A few days of blazing sun, a night of steady warm rain, and the snowdrifts were racing away down the valley in a thousand sparkling cascades. On the first Saturday morning of real spring, when the bare ground had looked up from under its winter covering, Janet came dancing out of the house. The recurrence of each new season brought her a sort of joyous shock. The first snow, the first peep of brown earth, the first frost, or the first dandelion in Sinclair's pasture behind the house were all occasions worthy of wild celebration.

Spring had come with such startling suddenness that she was more than usually happy. It was as if some very dear friend, or relative, her father even, had come home, without writing to announce himself. The unexpected sight of the good old earth set her running down the garden, leaping and shouting like a mad little girl.

Kirsty plunged into the housecleaning with a tremendous energy, having been taken unaware by the season. Spring had stolen up unheralded; and she was just a little discon-

certed, as though she had been caught napping in church and missed the text. So, though it was Saturday, she tied her head up in a white cloth and marched forth with pail and mop and turned everything upside down and inside out and scoured, beat and polished.

The confusion of housecleaning was a condition entirely after Janet's heart; and for a time she was amazingly busy, running upstairs and downstairs trying her best to help; until Kirsty commanded her to go away into the parlour and practise her music, or sit still on a chair like a wise child.

Janet took herself out of the way; but to sit down on this wild March morning of sun and wind would have demanded a straitjacket. So out she went leaping and capering down the garden walk, until Kirsty, viewing her tumultuous progress through the mist of soap suds with which she was flooding the front bedroom window, cried out in real alarm:

"Eh, preserve us! Is the bairn gone clean daft?"

Hugh Balfour was working on the last review of his Sunday sermon. He heard the ejaculation, and looking through his window, laughed aloud. He, too, felt the call of the spring and quite understood Janet's madness. She had got out her skipping rope, because you could leap so much higher if you had something to leap over; and Pepper and she were going through a sort of mad March Hare dance.

He wanted to go out and join her; and he threw up his window to catch a breath of the spring air. Clouds raced across the gleaming blue heavens. From far overhead came the cry of wild geese, winging their strong flight away to the free north. Everywhere rivulets sang and leaped and flashed away, down, down to the little creek, now a river, roaring and foaming through the valley. The woods on the hill behind the house, and on all the many hills visible from the village, swayed and sang the deep opening notes of their great resurrection hymn.

Away went Janet around the house, Pepper at her fly-

ing heels. When she disappeared, the watcher closed the window and went back to his work, smiling; and Kirsty continued her scrubbing, shaking her head ominously, and exclaiming over and over, "For peety sakes!"

Janet was wondering, as she ran down the garden to look at her hens, singing happily in their enclosure, if there would be any possibility of Mr. Balfour being induced to come out for a game of ball, when the best thing in the world happened. A red head, surmounted by the remains of a very ragged cloth cap came up over the fence; and the next moment Bud was perched on the fence top.

Janet screamed with joy, "Oh! Oh, Bud!" she shouted. "Come on down! Hurrah, and have a game of ball!"

But Bud remained where he was, and shook his head so solemnly that Janet ran to him.

"Is your mother washing?" she asked anxiously. It was not quite so bad as that, but it was bad enough.

"No, but I gotta go down to old Sarah Kennedy's with this stuff for Molly's new dress." He held up a large parcel in a shame-faced manner. "Hurrah over and go with me, will you, Jinny?"

Janet knew all about this wonderful new dress. Since Molly had gone to work for Miss Lena on Saturdays and holidays, she had earned enough to buy a new dress for Rosie, one for her mother, and one for baby Cornelius. And now, at last, she had bought one for herself. It was a beautiful pink muslin; Miss Lena had chosen it herself, in Algonquin; and had insisted that Molly get Sarah Kennedy to make it. The Cherry Hill dressmaker was not swift, and Molly must have her new dress for the Sunday School picnic on the twenty-fourth of May; and here it was March; and anyone, who knew Sarah Kennedy, realised that there was no time to lose.

To take the beautiful roll of pink muslin down to Miss Kennedy at the other end of the village seemed to Janet to be a very easy and delightful errand; but to Bud it was a dreadful ordeal. He was very shy and very much afraid of all women; and the idea of going into a house where

two strange ones lived to consult them regarding the making of a girl's dress overcame him with shame. It was no man's work, this visiting dressmakers. But as Tim had run away at the suggestion, and his mother had driven him forth alone, there was nothing to do but go. So he had come to Janet for help. Janet would know exactly what to say.

Janet was delighted. She had many a memory of times when Bud had guarded her past dangers. There was the Caldwell's gobbler, and Aggie Wright's gander, and the dreadful steer that lived in the Gibson's pasture field behind the manse. It was an inexplicable thing that this fearless hero should be afraid of an old woman; and Janet was humbly proud and glad to help him.

She threw her skipping rope into an apple tree, and dashed up the steps and away through the house calling for her mother. She was possessed of a dreadful fear lest she might not be allowed to go. If it were Nellie Gillespie or Lennie Caldwell who had called for her, the task might be very easy, but to get away on an expedition with Bud was as difficult as it was delightful.

Mrs. Meldrum was busy looking over summer clothes, and was in her room surrounded by open drawers and boxes. Janet was so essentially honest that she was incapable of making anything appear better than it was; so she stated the case frankly, dreading lest she be refused, and prepared to argue the case to the last.

What was her glad amazement, then, to receive permission at once. "Kirsty has been wanting some of the home-made soap Mrs. Murphy promised her. So you must take a basket and bring a few bars; and Bud will help you carry it," her mother said. "Here is the money to pay for it, and be sure not to lose it. And be a good little girl, and don't tear your dress, nor run on the street; but hurry, for Kirsty needs the soap for scrubbing."

Long before she reached the bottom of the stair Janet had forgotten all these admonitions in the delirium of going. Kirsty produced a basket and a long admonition not

to be stravogin' here-away, there-away, but to walk along quiet-like, like a wise bairn.

Janet was at the bottom of the garden and through the back fence almost before Bud knew she was gone.

They put the precious dress carefully into the basket, and set off in high spirits, swinging it between them. They raced with the wind over the soft yielding pasture field, dancing along over the patches of shadow that chased the patches of sunlight over its dun surface; while Pepper ran ahead, and doubled back, and went round and round them quite the maddest of the mad little trio. There was a nice dry cement walk down the village street; but the muddy path behind the village over the field was much superior. For while the village street ran as straight and uninteresting as the ruler on one's desk at school, the back path went meandering here and there, dipping into hollows, and through clumps of trees, and was fully twice as long as the street. Far away over the bare brown fields a flock of crows, who were moving out of their winter house in the swamp, were cawing and quarrelling as to where they should settle for the summer. And as they passed the Beckett orchard, oh, wonder and joy! there was a robin: the advance agent of the great spring choir, singing the Glory Song in the swaying top of a bare maple! Bud and Janet stood breathless to listen. It seemed so very long since they had heard his delightful, silvery, "Cherrily,—chirriily."

The stream that crossed the village street roared past; a grey river, carrying pieces of ice on its foaming billows. Bud suggested that Janet wait till he ran back for some boards that were in their shed, and they would rig up a raft in no time. But though Janet was generally ready for any venture, this time she showed discretion. They must not risk a voyage with Molly's pink muslin dress on board. Bud saw the wisdom of her decision and they climbed the fence and walked sedately across the bridge.

A run down the slope, and they were at Sarah Kennedy's little gate. As they came opposite the Bradley

House, Janet waved her hand at the old man sitting in the sunny window mending a boot. The ragged paper window blind was rolled up crooked as usual, and the sun shone in upon his grey bent head. Janet felt a pang of pity. She was very much annoyed at the people who made the "Globe," that they should have behaved so badly. She and Nellie had often written to the editor of their Sunday school paper; she wondered if she would be equally successful if she wrote to the editor of the "Globe" and told him the havoc he had wrought. He would likely be a nice man, and would feel sorry that poor Old Watty could not sing and make melody in his heart to the Lord.

"Bud, is it very bad to be a Tory?" asked Janet.

"A Tory?" Bud cried indignantly. "You bet it ain't! It's awful bad to be a Grit, though; and you'd better stay away from Old Watty. He's a Grit."

"Well, I don't care; he's nice anyway," declared Janet loyally.

"My Dad's a Tory," cried Bud proudly.

"Is he?" asked Janet rather vaguely. "My father isn't; but he isn't a Grit either. I think he's a Liberal. It's all right to be a Liberal, isn't it, Bud?"

Bud was not so sure. Liberal had a rather suspicious sound, he thought.

"I'll bet Satan's a Grit," he declared suddenly.

"Oh, my!" cried Janet rather alarmed. "Is God a Tory, then?"

Bud was rather staggered by this logical conclusion. "I—I don't know," he stammered.

"Well," declared Janet, "I don't think a Grit can be so very bad; or Mr. Watty wouldn't be one. But I'm going to ask Mr. Balfour what he is; and whatever he is will be right."

They opened the gate that hung between two bare swaying lilac bushes. Here Bud shoved the parcel into Janet's hands and dodged behind her. "You ask her!" he whispered and disappeared.

Janet went up the door and knocked, feeling pleasantly

important. Miss Sarah opened it. She was in the midst of her sewing, and had a thimble on her finger; a piece of measuring tape hung round her neck; and the front of her dress was stuck full of pins. Miss Sarah lived in the pleasant belief that she was the best dressmaker in the county of Simcoe; and that the people of the whole countryside were just waiting their turn to come to her.

She held up her hands in laughing protest at the sight of Janet's parcel.

"Another dress to make!" she cried. "These folks'll be the death o' me. Why in the world they can't go to somebody else once in a while beats me!"

"Please, Miss Sarah," said Janet importantly, "this is Molly Kelly's pink muslin dress; and her mother wants to know if you can make it in time for the twenty-fourth of May; because Miss Lena says Molly must have it for the picnic. And they hope it won't hurry you too much to get it ready." Bud, listening behind the lilac bushes, was filled with wonder and admiration of the way Janet could carry off such a difficult situation. And then Miss Sarah invited her to come in and the door was shut. He regarded her with deep gratitude when she came out in a few minutes with a large cookie, with sugar all over the top, for each of them, and the promise of Molly's dress weeks before the picnic.

Mrs. Murphy was out in the yard behind the house, standing over a great cauldron of boiling soap, and looking not unlike an old witch, with the smoke whirling around her and the wind whipping her scant skirts and ragged little shawl. At the sight of her, Pepper barked and Bud hesitated, his hand on the gate hook. He regarded the weird figure askance. He had a superstitious fear of Mrs. Murphy and all her doings. Who knew what she might be brewing in that pot, which the unsuspecting village thought was harmless soap? Bud was not partial to soap, anyway. "I—I wish we didn't have to go in here," he said, adding, with a vague notion that he was showing up the worst

side of Mrs. Murphy's character, "she don't eat meat in Lent!"

"What is Lent?" enquired Janet, half alarmed. "Is it worse than being a Grit?"

"No; I don't think so, I don't know what it is, but it's Lent now, anyhow. It always is just before Easter."

"But what does it mean?" persisted Janet. "Is it borrowing something? Kirsty says Mrs. Murphy would borrow the nose off your face. But I don't think she would, do you?"

"I don't think she'd want to borrow Kirsty's nose," affirmed Bud, with solemn conviction. "But she don't eat any meat in Lent," he repeated, as though that stubborn fact condemned Mrs. Murphy unconditionally.

The subject of eating reminded Janet of a very real danger. She was not in the least afraid of any witch-like spell of Mrs. Murphy's. She liked her immensely. But she was really afraid of Mrs. Murphy's hospitality.

"Oh, you'll have to come with me, Bud," she pleaded. "She'll give me a slice of bread with molasses. I know she will. And if she does, will you eat my piece, too?"

This aspect of the case vitally changed the colour of the approaching call. Bud gallantly promised to suffer in Janet's stead, should the hostess proffer bread and molasses. And he followed her up the muddy little path to the veranda; where they picked their way among boxes and barrels and garden implements to the door. Here Janet, very properly, made an attempt to ring the bell. Mrs. Murphy's son, who had built the fine brick house for his father and mother, and placed every comfort in it which his generous Irish heart could think of, had attached a shiny bell to the front door. But like everything else in the Murphy establishment the bell was not doing its work. Janet pulled in vain. But an old hen was sitting on some early eggs in the ragged hammock, that had swung on the veranda through all the storms of winter; and she took upon herself the task of announcing the visitors. She gave a squall at the sight of Pepper, flopped off her nest,

her feathers bulging indignantly; and went down the steps screaming at the top of her voice that somebody was disturbing her. Mrs. Murphy came running around the corner of the house, the stick with which she had been stirring the witch's cauldron waving above her head, and dripping hot soap.

Bud started back; but Janet went to meet her, smiling.

"Oh, how do you do, Mrs. Murphy?" she asked cordially.

"Mother sent me over to see if any of the soap was ready, 'cause Kirsty is housecleaning, and Bud came to help me carry the basket."

Mrs. Murphy was all graciousness, "Sure, now, and it's the darlin' herself," she cried. "And indade it's the best soap I've got your mother'll have the day. And it's poor enough for the likes o' her. And how is yer mother, Jinet? And yer poor father, sure, now; is it gettin' better he is? And your mother, too, Buddy, the poor cratur?"

Janet and Bud followed her indoors; Janet answering all her questions politely. The children looked around wonderingly at the strange collection of objects that filled the room. There was a set of gayly upholstered furniture, that Patsy had bought, and a fine new shiny table; but they had almost disappeared from view beneath a deluge of groceries in paper bags, empty fruit jars, coal-oil cans, sacks of chicken-feed, kitchen utensils, and all the heterogeneous mass of objects that somehow gathered around Mrs. Murphy as dust gathered around a woollen mop.

The hostess made no apology for the disorder, as she led her young guests out to the yard where the soap was boiling. They followed her, eyes wide with curiosity, through the congested clutter of the front room, through the choked confusion of the kitchen, and scrambled around the unsurmountable chaos of the wood shed. They arrived at last in the wilderness of the back yard, where Mrs. Murphy carried on her rather ironical business of making soap, in an establishment where soap was so little used.

In the centre of the littered yard was a fire; and over

it was slung a huge cauldron. Near it lay the wood pile, which had fallen over and was consequently more convenient for the fire than when it was piled up. Over by the shed stood the leach, made of a barrel of ashes set up on a sloping platform; and from it the lye was dripping steadily into a fine china tea-pot. Mrs. Murphy did not work much, for she was a gay body of a very sociable turn, and liked better to gossip over the fence. But when she did work, she turned her household upside down in the effort. So, strewn about her, amidst heaps of ashes, were all the vessels the house contained, barrels, buckets, pots, pails, frying pans, and even the larger pieces of the gay china dinner-set which was Patsy's last Christmas present.

It was a place of absorbing interest even to Bud who was acquainted with the mysteries of soap-making in his own backyard. And Mrs. Murphy was a perfect hostess. She allowed them to stir the brown thick fluid that boiled in the pot like rich maple syrup. She let them fetch water from the pump and pile wood on the fire; and help her mix the evil-smelling grease with the lye; and altogether gave them a grand time. Janet and Bud could have stayed all day; but the sight of the grey-brown waxy cubes of hard soap piled on the back veranda reminded Janet of her errand. And she very reluctantly had to forego the joy of soap-making and prepare for home.

Mrs. Murphy counted out a half-dozen of the largest cubes; and then added another for good measure in her true Irish fashion. She ran into the house and came out with an old newspaper in which she wrapped them.

"It's owld Watty's paper; an' near the last one, too," she said. "The cratur isn't takin' anny now, an' it's missin' them I'll be for wrappin' up me eggs. Come away in now a minit, before ye go," she added with a knowing wink.

They followed her back along the winding path that led through the house, Janet full of foreboding; Bud in joyous hope, and Pepper sniffing suspiciously. Mrs. Murphy led them on into the front room; and there she dug up a

paper bag from a box. By good fortune the contents were store-biscuits, which Mr. Murphy had brought from town. They were tempting-looking, brown, spicy things; and being from a store were doubly acceptable. Even Janet was happy to take one; and Bud accepted the whole bag with a gasp of astonishment.

They had just one adventure on their homeward journey. They stopped to play for a few minutes on the bank of the stream, where it went roaring through the back pasture. In their attempts to board an iceberg that came sailing past, Janet sank in the mud, and, in Bud's gallant attempt to rescue her, he upset the basket of soap. Only one piece was lost, however; they managed to save all the others. The fugitive went sailing merrily down the waves, on its own foam; and the two unfortunate adventurers followed it along the bank, in a despairing attempt to recapture it. But it was no use; the water was icy cold, and the soap was very slippery.

Janet became conscious of her appearance for the first time when Bud shoved the basket through her back fence and left her and Pepper alone. She was dripping wet, and covered with mud, and blackened with smoke and soot; and altogether looked more like a chimney sweep than a nice little girl who had been purchasing soap. With the consciousness of her disarray came the knowledge that it was almost dinner time, too, and too late for Kirsty to use the soap in her morning's work.

She was making her way slowly toward the back door, fearful of the first meeting with Kirsty, when, to her great joy, Mr. Balfour came out of the shed. It was always such a relief to meet him first; and enter with him when one came home under a cloud. It was like having something to break your fall when you descended from a great height. He had been looking over the car to see if it were ready for the road when the mud should dry; and he met the little blackened and drowned figure face to face. He could not hide his astonishment; though he made a heroic attempt to hide his mirth.

"Jenny Melody!" he exclaimed, "where ever have you been?"

"I've been getting soap from Mrs. Murphy," answered Janet, looking up at him apologetically from out of an eye so blackened that it gave her a positively dissipated look.

"Well, that's the last sort of errand anyone would suspect you of," he declared, choking.

She slipped a little blackened hand into his, in the way that always tangled her up with his heart strings.

"Oh, Mr. Balfour, we had the loveliest time we ever had in all our lives, Bud and I; but I'm afraid I'm late and Kirsty won't like it. Do you,—would you mind if I went in at the front door and you took the soap to her? I—I'm afraid she'll say things."

Mr. Balfour was quite sure she would say things, very many things indeed, and their quality would equal the quantity. So he took the basket and went towards the kitchen door, while Janet scampered around to the front. He devoutly hoped there would be none of the Ladies' Aid there to meet her, and that she would not fall into the greater danger while avoiding the lesser. But for once fortune favoured her. She met no one until she presented herself in all her disarray before her mother's dismayed eyes. Kirsty never knew the manner of her home-coming, and she received the basket graciously from the minister, as Janet knew she would. For Mr. Balfour was now firmly placed high in Kirsty's regard. He might not be as thoughtful about clean floors and a tidy wood-shed as Mr. Meldrum, but he had one crowning virtue: he called her Miss McLeod. That was enough. He might walk up and down the kitchen floor all Saturday morning if he so chose and no one would dare to molest him.

As he handed Kirsty the basket he was struck by a peculiarity in the newspaper that was wrapped about the soap. It showed signs of the perilous passage it had travelled via Janet and Bud, and it was months old besides; but he found it very interesting. The headline had been cut off and a new one pasted in its place. When Kirsty had

removed the soap, he took it out carefully; and folding it, carried it upstairs to the study.

When Janet came to visit him that afternoon he questioned her.

"Where did you get the newspaper?" he asked.

"Mrs. Murphy gave it to us. She wrapped the soap in it," Janet explained. "There were seven pieces, but we lost one in the creek. I wanted to go back and look for it this afternoon; but Mother wouldn't let me; and Bud says it will be all into suds by now. I hope it won't hurt Wright's cows if they drink out of the creek. Do you think it will? Perhaps soapy water will be good for them, and make them all clean inside."

"Does Mrs. Murphy take the 'Globe'?"

"No, they don't take any newspapers. Mrs. Murphy says reading is bad for people's eyes. But she used to get all Mr. Watty's old papers. And she says she misses them now; 'cause the cratur won't read the 'Globe' any more. Perhaps I could get Dr. Gillespie's 'Globe' and take it to Mrs. Murphy instead of Mr. Watty. But she doesn't really need anything to make her sing in her heart. I think Mrs. Murphy makes melody in her heart all day, but I don't know whether it's to the Lord or not."

Hugh Balfour, looking over the crumpled newspaper in his study alone, at a loss what course to pursue. He knew that to tell Old Watty that he was the victim of a practical joke would be a greater blow to his pride than even the false editorial. The discovery disturbed him more than he confessed even to himself. He wished that the beautiful girl with the golden voice had had no part in the affair. It was a very little thing, to be sure, he assured himself; just some merry nonsense of thoughtless young people. But his heart demanded that Sylvia be as beautiful in spirit as she was in appearance. It seemed impossible to imagine her anything but kind and considerate.

CHAPTER XVI

MR. WATTY TAKES A MUSIC LESSON

JUST one more day, Pepper! Just one more day! Oh, Pepper, don't you wish you were going too?"

Janet chanted this joyous refrain as she rummaged through her bureau drawers for collars and ribbons, and carried them to her mother's room to be packed in a suit-case. For a great event was about to happen. Janet and her mother were going to Toronto to spend the week of the Easter holidays. Aunt Flora had written asking them to come. Kirsty had promised to take good care of Mr. Balfour and Pepper and Blackie and the hens. And Mr. Balfour was going away for a few days' visit to the West Hampton minister, and would not be too lonesome. And they were really and truly to start to-morrow! Janet was wild with joy over the prospect of her first ride on the train, and her first visit to a big city.

"I wish we could take you, Pepper," she declared, as the little dog poked his nose into the box in which she was placing her collars. "I wish we could take you, and Blackie and Mr. Balfour, and Kirsty, and Bud, and Nellie, and Baby Corny,—Oh, you bad boy!"

Pepper, who had been looking into the box, with his head on one side enquiringly, here snatched Janet's best lace collar; and made off with it down the hall. Janet gave chase, screaming; they dashed into Mrs. Meldrum's room, circled round a chair, and both dived under the bed.

"Janet!" her mother straightened herself from the suit-case in which she was carefully placing her best dress, "Janet, child, what are you doing? Pepper, you naughty dog!"

She caught him, as he emerged from under the bed, and rescued the collar; admonishing the thief, who did not seem the least ashamed, but wagged his tail and looked up, his head on one side, expecting some more fun.

As this was the fourth interruption of this sort, Mrs. Meldrum realised that if she was to do her packing that morning, she must get rid of the troublesome pair for half-an-hour.

"Put on your coat, Janet, dear, and run down to the Post Office," she said. "Jimmie Sands must be in by this time; and Auntie Flora may have written again."

"But you need me to help you pack, Mother dear," Janet said generously.

"I think I can manage without you for a little while," her mother said, concealing a smile.

So Janet flung on coat, cap and rubbers; and she and Pepper went splashing down the muddy village street.

It was a dull rainy morning and Cherry Hill seemed deserted. It was the first day of the holidays and many of Janet's friends were away from home. Nellie and Kitty had left early in the morning to visit an aunt in Algonquin. Bud was up at Miss Lena's with Molly; even Miss Mitchell had left for her home in Orchard Glen. The prospect of the week's holidays would have been very depressing to Janet under less joyful circumstances.

Sure enough there was a letter for her mother. Mr. MacKay handed it out along with a pretty, scented note for Mr. Balfour. Her mother's letter was from Aunt Flora; Janet knew the big square envelope and the dashing handwriting, that went all the way across the surface. She hurried joyously homeward with it, arriving in such a brief time that her mother was rather dismayed.

"Here's a letter from Auntie Flora, and one for Mr. Balfour!" cried Janet, dancing in; and pulling off her coat and cap at the same time.

Mrs. Meldrum took the letter and sat down in the little rocker. "Take Pepper downstairs at once, Janet; see, his feet are all muddy; and look at your feet. Why did you

not take off your rubbers at the door, child? What will Kirsty say? Put Mr. Balfour's letter on the hall stand; and put your rubbers in the back hall. No, I can't read the letter until you do as you are told."

Janet dashed away, returning in a miraculously short time, eager to hear what more good news Auntie Flora's letter might contain.

Her mother put her arm around her, and drew her close. "Janet, darling, I'm afraid I've got a big disappointment for you. Auntie Flora writes that both Billy and Flossie have taken the measles. They are a very bad type and she says it would never do to expose you to them. She says she wants me——"

Mrs. Meldrum stopped suddenly, at the look of utter despair on Janet's face. Her sister had urged her to leave Janet in Kirsty's care and come herself; but she had not the heart to tell the child. She decided at once that she could not leave her.

"We must just make the best of it, my girlie," her mother said, after the first exclamations over the disaster. "Think how thankful we should be that you haven't the measles like poor Billy and Flossie. I must write to Mrs. Wallace and tell her I can go to the West Hampton conference after all."

But Janet had no meeting to console herself with; and she felt that even having the measles would be less dreadful than this catastrophe which had befallen her. She went slowly out of the room, and dragged herself heavily downstairs to tell the dreadful news. Kirsty was not one given to dispensing cheer; but she was always sympathetic in times of distress. But Kirsty was unusually busy, having reached the acute stage of her spring cleaning; and all the comfort she vouchsafed was:

"It's the will o' the Lord when sickness is sent, and poor human craters have no right to complain."

Janet left this Job's comforter, and wandering through the big bare house, sank heavily upon the bottom step of the stairs. Pepper followed and stood before her, his

bright, brown eyes asking plainly what was the matter. Janet could only stroke his little head in silent misery. It was Kirsty's melancholy habit, whenever she was the recipient of bad news, to predict the speedy consummation of all earthly things. Janet felt that this was surely an occasion pointing to the imminent termination of the earth and all it contained.

"It must be the end of the world, Pepper," she groaned.

There was a faint hope that Mr. Balfour might be in his study and she slowly mounted the stairs. The study door stood open, and the inviting flag hung on the knob, making the one bright spot in an utterly black world. But like all her other prospects, it proved a hollow mockery. The study was empty. Janet entered, and curling herself up on the sofa gave way to tears. She did not often cry; but she felt that if ever a human being had an excuse she had at this dreadful time of calamity.

How could one sing and make melody in her heart to the Lord when, as Kirsty plainly showed, it was the Lord's doings that she had to forego this wonderful trip to the city.

She heard the hall door swing open and shut in that sudden way that told Mr. Balfour was entering. She heard him put away his hat and coat in the hall below; heard him tear open the note she had brought for him; heard him whistling gaily; and then he came up the stairs two steps at each leap. She made a frantic effort to dry her tears before he caught her. It would be dreadful for him to find his little singer crying. She could not find her handkerchief where it ought to be in the pocket of her gingham pinafore; so she took up a corner of the pinafore itself and hurriedly brushed away the tears. Mr. Balfour always took the space between the stair head and the study door with one bound. She was hoping desperately that he would go to his own room first; but no, he took the one bound; and there he was, right in the doorway. She made a gallant effort; and looking up through her tears, said, "Hello,

Mr. Balfour." And then, hunting hopelessly for something cheerful to say, she added, "Isn't it a lovely day?"

He saw at a glance that there was something very badly wrong when the little girl had to make such a tremendous effort to be cheery, with such a poor result. He was wise enough to give her time to recover. "It is so," he declared, right in the face of the rain and the howling wind outside. He walked to the window and looked out, "I declare I like old March when he goes off on the rampage like this. Did you ever hear that funny song about the March wind? No? Oh, that was the jolliest song ever. The boys used to sing it at college, it went like this:—

"Oh the mad, March morning merrily moans
Making music, mist and mud!"

The sunshine was shining through the mist in her eyes, by the time the funny song was finished. When he turned from the window she managed to smile wistfully.

"You sing so lovely, Mr. Balfour; I wish I could sing like that."

"But think how sweetly you have been singing in your heart, for ever so long, far better than all the songs a fellow could sing out loud," he said, still wondering what the trouble was.

"I wasn't when you came in," she faltered. "I—I, oh, Mr. Balfour, I was crying."

"Crying? Oh, no, never! Jenny Melody crying!"

"Yes I was, just for a little while." She was deeply ashamed. "And I'm sure poor Mother is crying, too. We've got an awful disappointment. Auntie Flora wrote that Billy and Flossie have the measles; and they can't have me and the measles, too; so we have to stay at home."

Mr. Balfour looked quite reasonably solemn. "That's rather bad," he said. "I've been disappointed myself that way sometimes. Last winter I wanted to visit a-er-friend; and she couldn't have me."

"Oh, dear," Janet sighed heavily, "did her children have the measles, too?"

"No," his eyes twinkled, "she had something worse than measles; she had another visitor. But," he added, hastily, fearing she was growing too much interested, and that a storm of questions might come down upon him, "I just had to go and sing in my heart harder than ever."

"I suppose so," said Janet drearily. "But it's pretty hard to sing away down in your stomach when you have the dreadful feeling there that I have. I had it when Daddy went away; and now it's there again."

"But when we're disappointed that's just the time when we have to sing harder than ever. Let's start right now, and see how awfully jolly we can be. I'll tell you what we can do. Let's pretend we've each just come back from a long holiday. We've each had a wonderful trip; and we'll tell each other about it."

Janet's eyes began to brighten. This sounded like something very good indeed.

"Did I tell you where I spent my vacation, Miss Melody?" he asked with a very pompous air.

Janet leaped into the play. "Why, no, Mr. Balfour," she said in the perfect imitation of her mother's tone and manner which she was so capable of taking on without realising it, "I should like so much to hear about it."

"Didn't I? Why, Miss Melody, how could I have neglected it? Why, I was away on an elephant hunt in Timbuctoo." He related a wonderful adventure, in which he performed such amazing feats that Janet was very hard put to it to maintain her grown-up air, and almost choked to keep down a laugh.

"And I believe you said you spent last winter in California with your father, did you not?" he went on, after he had exhausted his capacity for romancing.

Miss Melody was ready, and more than willing. Oh, yes, and such a very delightful time she had. Why, the orange orchard which her uncle owned was ten miles long, and she used to go out and pick a barrel of oranges and lemons every morning before breakfast.

That was very interesting; but he was sure it couldn't

compare to the orchards of Timbuctoo. The Emperor had a grove of oranges; they were bigger than watermelons; and you couldn't get two of them into a barrel at once.

Miss Melody came back with the story of a swim in the ocean on Christmas Day among sharks and jellyfish that was bigger than the house, and how she rode away out on a whale's back until it knocked her off and a ship picked her up and she was nearly late for school that morning.

But this was quite tame to his experience with the elephants. They were wild, mad, elephants that used to foam at the mouth and climb trees and jump down on the poor people as they passed. And the Emperor of Timbuctoo was so grateful to him for killing them all off, that he gave him a palace to live in as big as the Algonquin Hotel, and a medal made of solid gold larger than the windmill on the top of Sinclair's barn, and a boa constrictor to wear for a watch chain.

This last was too great a strain on Janet's gravity. The grown up air vanished; she fell over on the sofa screaming with laughter.

Before she had stopped laughing, Mr. Balfour was looking at his watch. "Now I've got a game we're going to play. I'm going to sit down now and write a sermon that I hope will make some sad people sing in their hearts when they hear it. And while I am writing it I want you to work out a sermon. You go out and look for someone that is more unfortunate than you have been to-day, someone that is unhappy, and see what you can do to make him sing. You did it once before, remember, and think how successful you were."

She was up in a moment, shining-eyed. "Try someone in your own home first, and then if you can't do anything here, go down one side of the village street and up the other and then come and tell me how you have managed and I shall see if I can get my sermon finished before you get back."

Janet ran swiftly down the hall to where her mother was packing away the clothes she had got ready for the

morrow's journey. The sight of them almost made her heart sink again, but here was her own mother, as unhappy as herself and she was not helping her to sing. She ran and flung her arms about her. "Mother, won't you please go without me?" she asked. "Do, please! Kirsty and I'll get along lovely; and Mr. Balfour will be here nearly all the time. The measles wouldn't hurt you, would they?" Her mother looked at the little girl, her eyes shining. It was very sweet to be considered in this way; and Janet was young to be so thoughtful. She had missed sorely any such care since her husband had left. Her eyes filled with grateful tears. "Janet darling," she said kissing her. "Auntie Flora asked me if I'd come, but I hated to leave you. Are you sure you won't be lonely and want Mother?" "Oh, no, not a bit, I won't miss you the least smallest bit," cried Janet in the exuberance of her anxiety. "Please do go, and we'll have lots of fun; and Mother, if you do go may I go to Miss Lena's and stay one night when Mr. Balfour is away?"

"You are a generous darling to think of wanting me to go," her mother said, "and if I can arrange it I shall." Already a pretty flush was on her mother's cheeks. Janet was overjoyed with the result of her first attempt. She had little trouble gaining permission to go on her errand; after her generous offer her mother could not well refuse. "Well, dear, you may go, but don't stay long with Mr. Watty, Janet, I don't like you being in the damp musty place so much; and hurry back, dear, before dinner; and don't keep Kirsty waiting."

Janet flung on her coat, her cap and rubbers and set off like a young knight in armour, riding out to right wrongs. The sun had come out; the clouds were being swept up into glorious white heaps by the wind, and were scudding away over the gleaming blue floor of the sky. She was very happy over her mother's happiness. It seemed so wonderful that a disappointment could be so pleasant. Of course, it would have been lovely to visit Cousin Flossie and ride on the street cars,—Janet suddenly

pulled herself together and refused to think of the disappointment. She paused before the Kelly home. She was almost sure to find someone there in trouble. But on the contrary, the Kellys were in the highest spirits. Rosie screamed to her to come on in and see the wonderful pattern they had got for Molly's new dress. And the beautiful piece of flannel that Molly had bought for another dress for Corny. And Sarah Kennedy said that she'd start Molly's dress next week; and it would be the prettiest sight in all the village. It was very pleasant at the Kellys, even with Bud away; but it was no place for a person in search of misery; and Janet tore herself away. The Becketts' house came next. Martha Beckett was getting ready to visit Miss Mitchell at her home over in Orchard Glen for the holidays, and Susie was going to have a party on Monday night. So there was no need of her help there. The Gillespie home across the street looked very trim and pretty, with signs of tiny green fingers already being pushed up through the soft soil. The very sight of the place brought a recurrence of the terrible disappointment; for Kitty and Nellie were visiting in Algonquin. Janet hurried past, and ran up the steps of MacKay's store. Mr. MacKay, the storekeeper, was known in Cherry Hill as a "joky body," and seemed jollier than ever to-day. He joked with Janet and asked her a new riddle; and she had a very pleasant little visit with him, while she bought a chocolate nut-bar. But she had not yet found her quest; and she ran down the steps of the store and crossed the little bridge. There was just one more place on this side of the street, the Bradley House; and surely she could do something for poor Mr. Watty. Perhaps he would like half of the chocolate bar. Across the street she could see Mrs. Murphy, her old shawl wrapped round her shoulders, leaning over her fence to gossip with Miss Sarah Kennedy. She could hear her loud cackling laughter and see her put her hand swiftly to her mouth to cover the toothless condition. Miss Sarah laughed too when Mrs. Murphy poked her in the ribs. They certainly seemed in no need of comfort.

Janet ran up the steps of the old Bradley House; Old Watty was at the window as usual, but he was not working. The tools of his trade were strewn on the window sill before him; and he was sitting looking out into the street, his brows bent, his eyes lowering. Janet waved her hand to him, as was her custom, using this announcement of her arrival, in place of a knock; and throwing open the door, she burst in with the sunlight and the wind. And then she stopped suddenly, shutting the door and standing with her back to it; for Mr. Watty was not alone. A man and a woman were sitting by the stove, a stout cheery-looking woman, in a very fine, silk dress, and a long sealskin coat, and a man in a big coon-skin. Janet recognised them at once. She had met them twice last winter at Miss Lena's home. This was Mr. Tom Sinclair who lived in the "Castle" Down Below, and the lady was Tom's Woman, who had tried to feed poor Mr. Watty on cold potatoes and humble pie.

Janet went forward in her most friendly manner to shake hands.

"Well, well," said Mr. Sinclair heartily. "I didn't know Uncle Wat had such nice little visitors."

"Oh, I come often," said Janet when the greetings were over. "I used to come every week when Mr. Watty read the 'Globe'; but you don't read it any more, do you, Mr. Watty?" she asked, glancing at him with gentle reproof.

Mr. Watty merely grunted. But the other two looked very much interested. It was the report of this complete overturn in Uncle Watty that had encouraged his relatives to venture upon a visit, and see if he had changed as radically in his attitude towards his family.

"Well, well, we all change our minds sometimes, Janet," said Mr. Tom Sinclair. "I was just saying that to Uncle Watty when you came in."

"How is your father getting on, Janet?" asked Tom's Woman. "Did you hear from him lately?"

Janet was delighted to talk about her father. Yes, he was getting stronger every day; and he wanted to come

home this spring and go to work; and maybe he would if the Doctor would let him. And Mother was very well, too; she was going to visit Auntie Flora, in Toronto. Here Janet heaved a great sigh.

"We're expecting some visitors this holiday, too, if the roads are good," said Mrs. Tom glancing towards Uncle Watty, who continued to stare moodily out of the window. "We're hoping to have a family gathering in Easter week. You know, next Wednesday is Grandpa and Grandma Sinclair's golden wedding day. The whole family is coming home; and all Grandpa's and Grandma's brothers and sisters that are still living." She paused and glanced towards Uncle Watty again.

"Oh, my," cried Janet. "Won't that be lovely! There isn't any family at our house, only me, and Mr. Balfour; and he doesn't really belong to us. And now that Daddy's away we can't have much of a gathering. And Mother and I were going to Auntie Flora's in Toronto," she burst out, forgetting that she had come to bring cheer and not to tell her troubles.

"We were all ready to go and Cousin Billy and Cousin Flossie went and got the measles, and Mother's got to go alone. And Mr. Balfour's going away to preach in Algonquin and I'll be all alone with Kirsty."

"Well, well, that's really too bad," said Mr. Sinclair sympathetically. "I think you'll have to come and join our family gathering. How would you like that?"

There was no need to ask. Janet looked at him with a great "Oh!" and was silent from sheer inability to speak.

Mrs. Tom smiled. She was a shrewd woman and she suddenly saw in Janet a possible lever for the difficult prying away of Uncle Watty from his disgraceful surroundings.

"Would your mother let you come, Janet?" she asked eagerly; and then she made her great venture, "Perhaps Uncle Watty is coming," she said in a low tone.

Janet fairly leaped into the air. "Oh, oh, please, Tom's Woman! Oh, do you really think Mother would let me

go? Oh, Mr. Watty!" she jumped off her box and fairly launched herself on top of the old man. "Oh, I do believe that if you'd ask Mother she'd let me go with you, Mr. Watty! Oh, Mr. Watty! May I run and ask her now? Shall I tell her you're going and you'll take me? Oh, please, *please*, Mr. Watty!"

When Janet was especially excited over anything she curled up one foot under her short skirt and jiggled up and down on the other in the manner of a Highland dancer. She was leaping about the old man now, her eyes blazing with excitement, keeping time to her dance with the recurring, "Oh, Mr. Watty! Oh, Mr. Watty! Will you ask her? Will you ask her?"

Old Watty turned and looked at her. For a moment he struggled with the stubborn spirit that still lived within him; but it was not in mortal power to resist long the anguished pleading in Janet's eyes. He tried to hold back a smile, but it broke the ice of his countenance in spite of him. "Huh! huts, tuts!" he sputtered, "such a like Collie-Shankie about goin' doon the road. Run awa' then, and ask ye Mother. But tell her I'm no so sure o' goin'! But if I do go I'll take ye with me, but mind ye, I'm no so sure!"

But Janet was fairly wrenching the handle off the door in an effort to get out, and did not heed his warnings. Like a wise general who sees the moment to strike, Tom's woman arose hurriedly.

"I'll go with you, Janet, and ask your mother if you can come with me—for fear Uncle Watty doesn't decide to go," she added this last with great emphasis, for Tom's woman, in spite of the blunder of the potato salad, knew Uncle Watty better than her husband did.

It was half an hour later when Hugh Balfour, coming out of his study to see how Janet's sermon had been worked out, met a wild and dishevelled little creature coming down the hall, dragging an old telescope valise, blind and deaf to her mother's admonitions. "Oh, Mr. Balfour, Mr. Balfour!" it was shrieking, "I'm going! I'm going! I'm going

Down Below to see the Castle and Mr. Watty and Tom's Woman! And they've got calves and lambs and little pigs! And I didn't get anyone that couldn't sing! And we're all going together! And, oh, I think I'm going clean daft!"

CHAPTER XVII

ON A SINGING TOUR

THE wind was hushed, and the soft spring twilight was falling over the purple hollows when a big car with a party of four turned in at the gate of the old Sinclair homestead and ran up the poplar-lined lane.

The old Sinclair farm from which politics and prosperity had driven Old Watty, was situated in that region between Cherry Hill and Lake Simcoe known as "Down Below." This stretch of rolling hill and wide valley and winding roads, fringed with towering elms, was as fertile as it was beautiful. In spite of this, or perhaps because of it, the population was small and was steadily decreasing. The farmers had prospered sufficiently to give their families an education; and when they had left to get it, they had never come back.

Like its neighbours, the old Sinclair homestead was well on its way to desertion. It was the most pretentious of all the handsome houses in the district, so extravagant indeed that the jealous countryside had dubbed it the "Castle." It was a huge, three-story, red-brick building, very much ornamented, and stuck all over with verandas, balconies and bay-windows. It had wide lawns surrounded by hedges and shrubs; and was approached by a beautiful winding lane of stately poplars. But on every side the Sinclair home had the appearance of being too great for the hands that held it. In summer the lawns were grown up in hay, the flower-gardens in weeds. The shrubs were untrimmed, the fences unmended; and the Castle itself was in great need of paint.

In it could be read the story of many an Ontario farmhouse. It had been built when there was a big family to live in it, and many hands to do the work; and by the time it was finished the family had gone out into the world and left it, like an abandoned shell on the sea-shore. There had been ten children reared in the little old house near the barn, which was now used as a hen-house; ten besides Sylvia Ward who had spent most of her childhood within its cramped walls. But now, only the old people with their youngest son and his ambitious wife and daughter occupied the Castle. And Tom's Woman and Tom's girl were hoping that each year would be their last beneath its wide roof.

So the Sinclair family were to have one last gathering on the old home-place before it passed into the hands of strangers. Every member who could possibly come home was to be there; and Tom's family were all nervously anxious that Uncle Watty should become reconciled before the family should journey from the ends of the earth and discover him in the ignominy of the Bradley House.

The stately poplars of the long lane stood dark against the faint rose-colored sky as the big car moved swiftly up from the road. At the sound of the horn, the door leading to the back veranda was thrown open; and Grandma Sinclair, in her white apron and her little black knitted shawl, came hurriedly out to meet them. Grandpa Sinclair, who was stone deaf, saw her go, and stumbling after her, his white hair shining in the lights from the car lamps. They did not know what success Tom and his wife had had; and were anxiously awaiting the possible return of the prodigal.

But in spite of much joy and relief there was no demonstration as old Watty, after five years' absence, walked back into the old home. His brother said, "Aye, Watty, lad," and shook hands hurriedly. His sister-in-law remarked that it was a fine night; and Old Watty responded that it was that,—fine. Bessie, the eighteen-year-old daughter of the family, cried, "Hello, Uncle Watty," and the reconciliation was complete.

Janet was led into the big, warm kitchen, where Bessie had laid out the supper on the white oil-cloth covered table. There were sixteen rooms beyond the door against which the table was set, but even the ambitious Mrs. Tom had long ago given up trying to use them, and Grandpa and Grandma never went far from the kitchen stove, and only when there was company was the big house heated.

Janet was too tired and sleepy even to eat her supper, and went stumbling up the stairs after Bessie to fall instantly asleep in a chilly bed that she dimly felt was big enough to hold all the girls in Cherry Hill school. But she was up early the next morning, ready for a tremendous day's activity. She sat next to Mr. Watty at breakfast; and her gay busy presence helped him to resume his old place with less awkwardness than if he had been alone.

Grandma Sinclair was a kind old lady whom Janet loved the moment she set eyes on her; and Grandpa was just Mr. Watty over again, only that he was very deaf and very silent.

Janet was very much interested in the young lady of the family; because she looked just a little like Miss Sylvia. Only, instead of Sylvia's bright radiance, Bessie wore a face of rebellious discontent. Janet studied her as she ate her porridge and rich cream. She concluded to put her up with the Stand Bys, seeing she was Mr. Watty's niece, and Miss Lena's cousin; but had to admit that her fixed frown, and her constant complaining made her look very much like a "Pickin' and Leavin'." She was sure that what Bessie needed was to learn to sing inside her.

For the first day Janet ran wildly about the farm, dragging Mr. Watty with her. He had intended to sit, morose and forbidding, behind the kitchen stove; but Janet gave him no opportunity to show his continued disapproval of the family; and he would not confess, even to himself, that he was just as anxious as she to look over the old place, and was secretly glad that she insisted upon taking him with her.

Janet had often visited, briefly, at the different farm

homes in the congregation; but this was the first time in her life she had had an opportunity to become intimately acquainted with all the wonders of a farm yard. At any time of the year it would have been an interesting place to her; but in the spring, with all the young things coming to life, it presented a world of wonders. There were new chickens coming peep, peep, out of the shell, new calves, new lambs, and a funny little colt set away up on his ridiculous sticks of legs. Janet came in from her first inspection of it all and sat down at the dinner table, too excited to eat.

"Oh, Grandma!" she cried, having adopted Bessie's title for the old people, "everything in the barn yard isn't any more than a few days old! Did you get all these new things because you knew Mr. Watty was coming home?" And they all laughed aloud, Uncle Watty joining.

She kept them all in constant laughter by her excitement and her rapturous exclamations. Every hour she would come tearing in from the barn to announce that still another new gift had been showered upon them.

The lambs presented the greatest wonder. At home it had been exciting enough to go out and find a new tulip coming up in the spring, or a new rose on Father's favourite bush. But to run out into the field behind the barn and discover a new lamb, a real live, woolly, baa-ing lamb, grown up in the night, full blown, without either root or branch; why, it was a miracle!

Each morning she was up earlier than the one before, and dressing in mad haste, with her long hair in such a state as would have driven Kirsty clean daft, away went Janet over the brown fields to see what crop of lambs the night had brought forth. And just as the family were gathering for the early farm breakfast, she would come tearing back, her dishevelled braid blown on the wind, her face red with excitement, screaming, "There's another! Oh, oh, Mr. Watty! Grandpa! There's another lamb in bloom!"

And the morning she discovered twins: two staggering,

whimpering, wee fellows, shivering close to their mother, in their tiny woolly garments, Janet threw the whole household into consternation. They were just sitting down to breakfast, when a wild figure came whirling past the window, and leaped into the kitchen. Janet's eyes were starting from her head, and she danced up and down on one foot in the middle of the floor, gasping incoherently, incapable of telling what it was all about. Grandma Sinclair cried out in alarm; Tom's woman ran for the Painkiller bottle; and Grandpa, who was stone deaf, and had lived in terror of a fire ever since the new house had been built, became suddenly convinced that Janet's convulsions meant that the Castle was in flames, and grabbing up the water pail, he started for the stairs.

Every day was surely a fresh beginning, every morning was the world of little living things made new. The lambs were not the only rapture. There were new kittens in the barn; and there was always a new hen coming out of some obscure corner, ruffled and worried, and exceedingly proud and disagreeable, surrounded by a busy cloud of peeping adorable yellow chicks. One day Mr. Tom called to Janet when she was helping Bessie get the potatoes for dinner, and she ran down to the stable. He was smiling in a mysterious manner, and led her to the pen where a cross old pig was kept shut up. And there lay the old sow on her side in the hay, and beside her, in a perfect mathematically straight row, were ranged nine little cylindrical bodies, all exactly the same size, each with exactly the same little squeak in it; some white, some pale pink, and one perfect little gem of a fellow, beautifully speckled. Janet hung onto the side of the pen, and screamed until Mr. Tom was so weak with laughter he had to go and lie down in the hay.

Another miracle was old Solomon, the barn cat. Sylvia had called him Solomon, Bessie explained, because he was so wise. And he surely was a clever cat. Janet never missed the evening milking, so that she might see Solomon being fed. He did not wait for a saucer like a respectable

house cat, for Solomon was a bold rascal and not the least bit civilised or mannerly in his habits. And so when Bessie was milking, he would stand up a few yards away, open his mouth and receive a strong stream of milk straight from its source. And Solomon would swallow it without winking a whisker, just as long as it was administered. Then, there was the house-pussy, who was very nice, but, of course, not at all like Blackie. And there was old Sport, the dog, who wasn't really a sport at all, like Pepper, but a very quiet solemn old fellow.

And if there was anything in the world funnier than seeing Solomon fed, it was watching the calves get their supper. Such ill-mannered scamps as they were, either shoving their foolish little heads into the pail so far that they choked, or knocking it out of Bessie's hands altogether.

Although Janet was so absorbed in the barn yard and all its exciting doings, she found time to be very useful to Mrs. Tom and her daughter. She ran on errands to the barn and upstairs and down cellar. She dried the dishes, and helped prepare the vegetables, and did all the delightful things that Kirsty forbade her doing at home. The two women found her very helpful, for they were extremely busy preparing for the great family gathering. The big rooms were opened and swept and aired; and Old Watty found himself falling back into his old employment of fireman; and he and Janet had very happy times looking after the stoves.

It was a very large family that was coming back to the old home: a family that had made an honourable place for itself in the world. Only two had remained on the land: the Sinclair of Cherry Hill, and Tom in the old home. There was a doctor in Algonquin, a lawyer in Toronto, a member of Parliament on the prairie, and a minister in a large city charge. The four girls had all been educated, and had married well; which meant that they had not married farmers. Only one had gone to the land beyond; and she had left her baby Sylvia to grow up the pet of all the Sinclair family.

Much to Janet's joy the heralds of the advancing crowd were Miss Lena and her mother. They came to help with the preparations and the father, with Sam, and Annie were to come later.

"Molly's keeping house just beautifully," Miss Lena told Janet, when the first rapturous greeting was over. "She and Bud are looking after things until Father and Sam come down."

"Did you see Mr. Balfour?" asked Janet, feeling, in spite of the lambs and the little new pigs, that she had been away from home a very long time.

Miss Lena flushed. "Yes, he's coming down to take you home when your mother gets back, Janet. Aunt Jennie asked him to the Golden Wedding, because he was so good to Uncle Watty."

Janet began hopping up and down. "Oh, oh, if Mother was only coming, then there'd be nothing in the world I'd want. But Mother's having a lovely time in Toronto; and I wrote and told her all about the little pigs and Solomon; so she isn't missing everything. Oh, Miss Lena, aren't you glad Mr. Balfour is coming?"

Miss Lena looked very glad indeed; but there was not much time to linger over even such a delightful subject. There was much work to be done. Mrs. Tom was carrying on the baking on a prodigious scale; and Miss Lena was her chief help.

Grandpa sat behind the kitchen stove and dozed or read in all the rush; and Grandma went about keeping an eye on all that was done to see that it was done just right. Uncle Watty brought in wood and water, and once Janet caught him slyly reading the "Globe" in the evening when it was brought in from the mail-box at the gate.

And then the children began to come home. The doctor with his wife and grown-up son and daughter from Algonquin were the first, followed closely by the minister and his family: one of them a tall young man who was studying to be a minister himself. There was the Member of Parliament from the West, who brought a grown-up son

and a nice little boy just Janet's age. There were three married daughters who came with such a lovely crowd of youngsters that, for a while, Janet forgot about the lambs and the pigs in this dazzling new situation. It was almost as good as if all Cherry Hill school went to live in one house. Such a crowd as there was, and such fun trying to find sleeping accommodation for them all at night, with the children four in a bed! And then there was such a joyous stir and coming and going; such a running to and fro, with everyone trying to do the same thing at once, and all getting in each other's way. Grandpa and Grandma went about in a happy daze; and Uncle Watty was so petted and pampered that the Bradley House with its gloom and its rheumatism seemed like a bad dream.

Everyone made so much of Janet that if she had been given to noticing the attention paid herself she would have wondered what she had done to make them all like her so. As it was she accepted the rapture of the occasion unquestioning. She led the children everywhere. They ran and climbed into the mow, and chased the calves, and played hide-and-seek in the barn yard; and Janet ran at the head of the mad procession from the first streak of dawn till she fell into bed at night, too worn out even to speak.

And then, on the third day, when the big rooms were all open; and Uncle Watty's fires dancing brightly; and the family laughing and chatting all over the house, a great, long, grey car swept down the road, and turning in at the gate, came purring up the lane between the poplars.

"Girls!" called Mary's Mary, who was a lively young lady of eighteen, "here's Sylvia at last! And I do believe she's bringing that rich man with her!"

"Syl would be sure to wait till all the work was done," remarked Bessie. "Yes, that's the car that belongs to that Hilton man; isn't it, Lena?"

The cousins and aunts, and a good many of the uncles were all at the door by this time to welcome the latest arrival.

"That's Mr. Hilton," whispered Willie's Alice, who lived in Algonquin and kept a jealous eye on her pretty cousin. "He's a banker, and he's awfully rich; but Sylvia won't tell us whether she's engaged to him or not. Hello, Sylvie! Oh, Sylvie!"

Grandma hurried out and clasped the girl in her arms, holding her closer and longer than any of the others, for the sake of the one who would not be at the Golden Wedding.

"Eh, Sylvia," she cried, the tears in her eyes, "I thought you were never coming, hinny."

"Oh, Granny, love! I was just dying to come last week; but I had to stay to sing at a poky concert. No, Mr. Hilton has to go right back. Goodness, you don't want him to come to a family gathering yet, do you?"

The house had been noisy and gay before, but with the advent of Sylvia it grew positively riotous. She was the centre of all the merriment. She played ball with the youngsters in the field, and checkers with Grandpa by the kitchen fire. She made Uncle Watty shout with laughter, imitating the fat professor, who gave her music lessons, and she made them all cry, as she sat at the piano in the twilight, and sang the old, old home songs they all loved.

"This dear old farm's the loveliest place in the world, after all," declared Sylvia, as the young people gathered on the sunny back porch to prepare the vegetables for dinner. "If you won't stay here, Bess, I believe I'll have to marry a farmer myself, and take it over. Cousin John, wouldn't you rather be a farmer and settle down here with me than go preaching?"

"Perhaps that fellow that belongs to the big car would accept your offer, Sylvie," cried another boy-cousin. "He looks rich, so you could keep the car, and scoot into town every night after you'd fed the pigs."

"But it is lovely here," declared Cousin Walter, who had never before been away from the prairies. "It looks like fairyland to me," he gazed dreamily over the sunny blue

and dun hills and hollows. "Why do you want to get away so much, Bessie? Just look at that!"

Bessie followed his gaze. "Look at what?" she asked blankly. He swept his hand towards the wide valley, lying warm and golden brown in the sunlight, smilingly waiting for the great command, "Let the earth bring forth." But Bessie Sinclair belonged to the unfortunate ones of the world whose eyes are holden. She had never seen the lovely pageant of hill and valley, that rolled away from her door down to Lake Simcoe. A wheat field by the lake's brim a yellow wheat field was to her, and it was nothing more. And what so common as a field?

"An Ontario farm may be nice to look at," she admitted, "but it's a dreadful place to live on." She took vicious slices off the potato she was peeling. "And I'd like to see Sylvie milk six cows, and feed the calves, and get the meals for three or four men in haying time," she added. "You left this farm yourself, Sylvia Ward, and you know you couldn't be paid to stay."

It was one of poor Bessie's many grievances that Sylvia, who had been brought up as her sister, should have been allowed to go out into the world, while she remained.

Sylvia laughed good-naturedly. "Why do you do it, then?" she asked, seating herself in the sunshine, where her hair shone like burnished copper. "I make it a rule of my life not to do things I hate; and then everything's nice and pleasant."

"Indeed I know you do!" cried her cousin resentfully. "But I'm not that kind. How could I go away and leave Mother and Grandma to do all this work? You can't get a hired girl, not if you gave her the farm. Lena's just the same; she doesn't want to stay home any more than I do. Do you, Lena?"

"Never mind, Lena," cried her Cousin Alice from Algonquin. "It won't be so hard when you live in a manse. A preacher doesn't keep pigs and calves."

Lena's sallow face flushed painfully, and Sylvia Ward darted a bright searching glance at her cousin.

Janet and the little boy from the prairie had been sitting on the steps helping with the potatoes and listening intently to every word that was said.

"Oh, Bessie," Janet cried suddenly, "if you'd only sing away down in your stomach, you'd like living on the farm. It makes you like most everything!"

Bessie joined the laughter in spite of her ill-humour. "You really are the funniest little kid I ever saw. What are you talking about?"

So Janet explained all about the silent singing which Mr. Balfour had taught her, and Sylvia Ward came and sat beside the little girl and listened, her eyes downcast, her laughing mood turned to seriousness.

"What's the joke about Lena and a preacher?" asked John's Margaret, from Toronto, as she followed Sylvia to the barn gate. "Is she going to marry this minister the little Meldrum kiddy is so crazy about?"

Sylvia was always cheery and good natured, so Margaret was surprised when she answered rather impatiently:

"Oh, dear me, no! That's only Alice's nonsense. He never looks at poor, old Lena."

Miss Margaret Sinclair was twenty and very wise in the ways of young women. She looked at her cousin quizzically. "Perhaps he's been looking in another direction," she suggested slyly. "I've been wondering why you were spending so much time at Cherry Hill lately." She was rewarded by seeing the rose-colour deepen in Sylvia's cheeks. "Now, now Sylvie," she cried, delighted with her discovery. "Remember the grey car!"

"Oh, hang the grey car!" cried Sylvia with unusual vehemence.

The Golden Wedding day passed off gloriously. There was a great wedding breakfast for the family at noon; with a wonderful array of dazzling presents piled on the table. In the afternoon, all the old friends from the surrounding country came to bring the aged bride and groom their good wishes.

Most of the old farm neighbours were retired and lived

in Algonquin; and all day a stream of cars and buggies came down the road and up the long lane between the poplars. Janet could not be coaxed away from the road, for this was the day Mr. Balfour was to come; and she swung on the gate, and watched for him from the moment breakfast was over. Janet had, from the first moment, established herself the leader of the younger set; so they all moved down to the gate, too; and the girls played Hop Scotch and the boys played ball in the road. At last Janet's watching faithfulness was rewarded. The familiar little muddy car came rattling down the road; and she threw open the gate, swinging out on it, and screaming rapturous words of welcome. She stood dancing wildly on one foot as he drove through, and when he stopped the car, she fairly clambered in on top of him.

"Oh, oh, Mr. Balfour!" she cried. "I was just *dying* for you to come! Oh, I've been waiting for you for years and years! And we're having the loveliest time in all the world! And there's nine little pigs, and one of them's speckled! And there's a new lamb nearly every morning! And this is Dorothy and Barbara and Mary and Bobby and Arthur. Oh, Mr. Balfour, I'm so glad you've come! I think I love you more than ever!"

He was delighted over the rapture of his welcome. "I was afraid you'd forget me, with all the lambs and calves and boys and girls that are here," he said, as he packed them all into a very small space for a ride to the house.

"Oh, I love you more than all the farm put together. I think you're far nicer than the pigs even. Oh, Mr. Balfour, Solomon drinks milk right out of the cow without waiting for a saucer!"

He had not time to give this wonderful fact its due consideration; for he had reached the veranda and there was the family out to meet him, Old Watty at the head, and beside him that for which he was looking: Sylvia's ruddy-brown hair, radiant in the sunlight. And at the sight the shadow that had fallen over her perfection melted away. She was standing on the steps, holding old Uncle Watty's

hand. It was impossible to believe she could have been unkind to the old man. Hugh Balfour's youthful heart assured him she was as lovely as she appeared.

Janet's days at the castle had been all too short, and this last one flew on swift golden wings. Every place had to have a farewell visit, every creature a farewell ceremony.

When Solomon had drunk his evening draught in the same wonderful fashion, and the little chickens and kittens and pigs had all been tucked into their beds, Janet and the other children ran out to the little pasture behind the barn, to view the evening dance of the lambs.

They all perched on the fence, Janet upon the very highest point, and watched the pretty procession come in from the fields. The music of their voices was very sweet in the soft, spring, evening air; deep contralto mother-voices, high childish treble notes, and an occasional shrill soprano, from the latest little lamb flower that had bloomed in the meadow. Away down by the creek a delicate green flush told that the pussies were out. The grass was green in the wet hollows, and the robins were making music in the budding maples. As Janet looked across the field, she saw a shepherd and shepherdess, as happy as any of the Golden Age, come straying up from the feathery greenness of the creek bank. One was tall and straight, a figure Janet would know at any distance; and the other one's uncovered head caught the level rays of the sun and shone like gold.

"That's Cousin Sylvia and your Mr. Balfour," said little Barbara from Toronto, who was a very wise, old, sophisticated person of twelve. "Mother says that Cousin Lena is in love with Mr. Balfour; is she, Janet?"

Janet was not quite sure; but she thought likely she was. Everybody who went to Knox Church was in love with Mr. Balfour, she explained, except, perhaps, old Mr. Gibbie Gibson, who didn't like what he said sometimes in his sermons. But everyone else loved him and as Miss Lena was a teacher in the Sunday School, she was likely in love with him, too.

"But I don't mean that kind of love," scoffed the sophis-

ticated one. "I mean in love like they are in picture shows when people get married. But I guess he likes Cousin Sylvia best," she added, regarding the pair absorbedly. "Cousin Sylvia is so pretty, isn't she?"

"Oh, lovely," agreed Janet enthusiastically. "Is she in love with Mr. Balfour, too?" she asked, very much interested.

"I don't know. But I heard Mother and Aunt Mary talking about it; and they said Sylvia wouldn't marry him if he's going to be a missionary. And Aunt Kitty says Sylvia would never do for a minister's wife."

"Why?" asked Janet. "Couldn't she be president of things? My mother's a minister's wife," she added, as though just making the discovery.

There was no time to discuss further the qualifications necessary for a minister's wife, for at that moment the pretty, white, woolly procession came through the gap in the fence, and started across the meadow to the barn. Just as the flock pushed through the bars, suddenly, as if one naughty lamb had said to his fellows, "Hurrah, let's all run away from mother," with one consent they all leaped forward and raced across the field, and up to the top of a little slope, as fast as their crazy little legs would carry them. And then, as suddenly, they whirled about and came tearing back, as though a pack of wolves were at their flying heels. The moment they reached their mother's side, they changed their mad little minds again; and off they flew once more in still more frantic haste. The second race was madder than the first. They seemed to run over patches of ground charged with electricity, and up would go a dozen little woolly bodies high into the air; others would leap from side to side as if in convulsions; and all went through the most extraordinary capers. Away ahead of the others, two, fleeter-footed than their companions, were running a neck-and-neck race, as though a fortune had been placed upon the winner. But just when anxiety as to who should reach the goal first was at white heat, they both stopped dead, whirled, faced each other, and footed as

pretty a dance as though they had just come out of a young lady's school!

The children on the fence laughed till they cried; Janet hung on to the rail and screamed with delight; and even the jaded old person of twelve gazed at the sight in wonder and admiration.

The antics were growing less extravagant, when the shepherd and shepherdess strolled up. A little hawthorn tree and some raspberry bushes grew beside the fence where the children were sitting; and the two strollers seated themselves upon the stones beneath and talked in low tones. When Janet crawled along the top of the fence to be near Mr. Balfour, she found he had left. He had been claimed by the young divinity student, whom he had known at college; and was walking with him slowly down the lane. Bessie was sitting in his place, the calves' empty pails at her feet.

"Goodness, I'm tired," she was saying, shoving away the pails distastefully. "I saw you, Miss Sylvie," she teased, "strolling away in the bush. If you don't mean business you'd better stop right now, or Lena'll be after you."

"Hush!" whispered Sylvia, glancing up to where Janet was perched just behind them.

"She doesn't know what we're talking about," answered Bessie easily. "But you oughtn't to do it, Sylvie," she added seriously, for in spite of many faults, Bessie Sinclair had a sense of duty. "You're just as good as engaged to George Hilton."

Sylvia leaned forward with her elbows on her knees. She clasped her white hands, and placing her pretty chin upon them, gazed gloomily down the lane where Hugh Balfour and her cousin were strolling in deep conversation. "Engagements have been broken before," she remarked significantly.

"Sylvie!" Bessie was alarmed. She was intensely proud of her cousin and anxious that she should bring glory upon the family.

"Sylvie! Mr. Hilton's rich and,—why, you'd be crazy! And he thinks the world and all of you."

Sylvia made no reply; her eyes, generally so bright and dancing, were dark and sombre.

"And that man's going to be a missionary. Janet says so," Bessie continued, feeling she had said the final word that would render Hugh Balfour utterly ineligible.

Sylvia suddenly stood up, her eyes shining again. "That's another kind of engagement that can be broken," she cried gaily. "If I can make him get over that notion, I'll—oh, little pitchers!"

Janet had turned and was looking down at them. She had been listening to the wise old lady of twelve describe a school concert in which she had played the leading rôle in "Cinderella," listening with one ear; but with the other she had heard every word of the low-toned conversation beneath her. She had heard it quite unconsciously; but had registered every syllable on her unfailing memory. But just now she had no interest in either it or Cinderella.

"Oh, Miss Sylvia, oh, Bessie!" she cried. "Oh, you're missing all the fun. The lambs are dancing the Highland fling!"

It seemed almost the next moment, to Janet, that she was seated beside Mr. Balfour ready for the homeward journey. Tom's Woman had filled the little car with flowers and fruit and roast chicken and candy and cake left from the wedding feast. The children hung on to Janet, promising undying friendship and unlimited correspondence: the women kissed her again and again; and Uncle Watty held her hand and patted it until the car had started, winking the moisture from his fierce old eyes. She did not long enjoy the ride home in the lovely warm spring twilight. Even the joy of knowing that Mother had come home and would be there to meet her could not keep her eyelids from drooping. And then as Mr. Balfour was unusually quiet and preoccupied, her head fell over against his arm; and she knew nothing more until Kirsty was carrying her indoors and uttering endearing words that Janet had not

heard from Kirsty since she was ill with the scarlet fever three years ago. And she could scarcely waken even when she was caught up in her mother's welcoming arms, and Pepper leaped up to lick her face.

CHAPTER XVIII

JACK-IN-THE-PULPIT

IT was Saturday afternoon and once more Janet had escaped the toils of the unhemmed towel. This was the third Saturday she had gone visiting with Mr. Balfour in the little car, and it was surely the best. For this was the first May Saturday, and the long winding white road that stretched ahead of them was lined with cherry blossoms and white hawthorn, and the pink glory of the wild apple trees. The bluebird called sweetly from the fence tops as they spun past, the little pine warbler trilled out his noisy song from the cedars; and in the green fields bobolink, robin, meadow-lark and thrush vied with each other in seeing who could make the most music.

Each hill the travellers climbed,—and they were either climbing a hill or sailing merrily down one,—displayed a new view, lovelier than the last.

Whenever they passed along a lonely part of the road Janet began to sing, not in her heart, but audibly. These drives with Mr. Balfour were made doubly charming because he so often allowed her to put aside her silent singing and become vocal. Indeed, he encouraged and helped her by suggesting all sorts of funny things to sing. There was the delightful rhyme about a donkey.

“Sweetly sings the donkey
As he goes to hay,
If you don’t go with him
He will run away.

"Heigh a-ho-ah,
Don't you hear him say,
'Heigh, a-ho, a-heigh, a-ho, a-hay!'"

Mr. Balfour explained that the secret of singing this song correctly was to imitate a donkey as well as possible; and its chief advantage was that it had no tune.

Janet thought that a song with no tune was the finest thing she had ever discovered, until Mr. Balfour invented something even better. It was a funny ditty that sent her into screams of laughter. It had plenty of rhyme, he explained, but no reason at all, and went something like—

"Hibbeldy, Hobbeldy, Hammerdy Hay
Ockerty, Pockerty, Lickity, Lay,"

and a great deal more quite as delightful and unintelligible.

Janet liked it the best of all; for, as she explained, while a song without a tune was something very convenient, a song without either words or tune left nothing to be desired on the part of the singer; and as they spun along they made the woods ring with its discord. When they came near habitations they became well behaved and told riddles. Janet had just got a new book of riddles; and there was one in it that Bud had warned her to lay before Mr. Balfour. "Why is a dog's tail like the heart of a tree?" But Janet's mind was on the answer and in her unconscious frankness she blundered,—

"Why is a dog's tail like the bark of a tree?" and gave the answer away.

It was altogether a delightful drive, and they had a pleasant visit at old Jabez Gibson's, where there were new chickens and lambs almost as wonderful as at the Castle.

But coming home, Mr. Balfour was much quieter; he seemed to be in a deep study, and Janet tried to talk as little as possible, fearing he might be thinking over to-morrow's sermon.

But he was not thinking of the morrow's sermon, he was meditating sadly upon the apparently slight effect all his

sermons had had upon the man he had just left. Jabez Gibson was rich and hard and selfish; and yet he was a member of the church and exceedingly self-righteous. The young minister was asking himself what he had done for this man. Mr. Meldrum would return probably before the end of the summer; and his year in Knox Church would be over; and what signs of a better life in the community could he see as the reward of his labours?

There were many Jabez Gibsons in the congregation, and their lives were sordid and unlovely. To many, Sunday was merely a day to stay at home and sleep after a hard week's money-making; or to take the car and go visiting. He doubted if he had been successful in even stirring up any community spirit among the young people of Cherry Hill. The town was so near, and all their thoughts turned thither. The discouraged young minister wondered if he were wasting his strength in a thankless and useless task. And if his efforts met with such poor returns in Christian Canada, how utterly impossible would be the work he had set his face towards in a heathen land? Hugh Balfour was riding along the hilltops on a lovely May day, but his soul was down in the valley, and a bleak November wind was sweeping over it.

The car had been noisily climbing a long winding hill. A clear little brook went singing down its side among tiny ferns and musk and vivid green moss. On either hand the green tangle of the swamp came close to the road and the air was filled with the cool sweet fragrance of cedar and tamarack and spruce. At the top of the hill he stopped the smoking little car. To the left an open grassy space was hedged in by a wild tangle of underbrush, now a perfect riot of trilliums, red and white.

"Oh, oh," cried Janet, rapturous over its beauty. "That's the big berry patch, Mr. Balfour. Everybody comes up here when the blackberries are ripe. But Mother's never let me go yet. If you go picking berries this summer, will you take me?"

He promised, all unthinking, his eyes turned away to

the valley that lay at his feet. "Look, Janet," he said, "do you know what place that is?"

Far away down there, and yet so near, it seemed to Janet that she could put out her hand and pick up the little church that nestled in the feathery green, stood Cherry Hill. They could follow the flash of the "Crick" as it went wandering here and there, away and away Down Below, until they lost it in the belt of the dark green swamp. As far away in the opposite direction lay the clear blue floor of Lake Simcoe, miles and miles of it. Mr. Balfour pointed out a tiny, red, brick house and a toy barn, and a silo like a thin piece of lead pencil beside it, and Janet was astonished and enraptured to know that it was Grandpa Sinclair's. She strained her eyes in the hope that she might discern Mr. Watty; and Mr. Balfour stood and looked as if he, too, were trying to see someone.

The little fields were of every conceivable shade of green, and no two were alike. The woods were still another green; and the ploughed fields were all colours, even purple and pink, and indeed every colour but brown, as Mr. Balfour pointed out. And as they sat there, he said softly, "O Lord, how manifold are Thy works, in wisdom hast Thou made them all." Janet sat perfectly still, feeling as though she were in church and prayers were being offered. And after a silence he repeated something else that Jane loved; but which was not so familiar to her as the words of Scripture.

"Nature never did betray

The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,
Through all the years of this our life, to lead
From joy to joy; for she can so inform
The mind that is within us, so impress
With quietness and beauty, and so feed
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
Rash judgments nor the sneers of selfish men,
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
The dreary intercourse of daily life,
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
Our cheerful faith that all which we behold
Is full of blessing."

Janet had not moved during its recital; and Hugh Balfour looked at her wonderingly. She always surprised him with her love for poetry. Even when her childish mind did not at all comprehend the meaning, she would sit, listening intently, while he read; held, apparently, by vague glimpses of its beauty.

And then he got out and cranked the little car; and away they spun down the hill, the glorious view vanishing and reappearing again and again as they shot past openings in the forest. But the vision on the hill-top had not dispelled the doubts and misgivings. He had been climbing his Hill Difficult and like Christian he was descending all unknowing to meet his soul's enemies, Timorous and Mistrust.

When they had reached the level floor of the valley and were within a few miles of the village, they passed Henry Gibson's grove. Janet peeped longingly into its flowery depths. Henry Gibson's grove was one of the picture spots of this picture region, and every twenty-fourth of May Knox Church held a picnic under its green shade.

The little stream, that ran through the village and grew into a river Down Below, passed through the grove slowly, and lingered in a lovely little pond framed in golden-hearted water lilies, and blue-flowered arrow-head, and a white pillared birch grove. Henry Gibson's wife, who had been president of the Ladies' Aid in Knox Church ever since anyone could remember, made Henry keep the cattle fenced off from the Grove, so that it was clean and untouched; and the flowers grew there in such abundance that the man who taught botany in the Algonquin High School always made a trip out to it in June with some of his pupils. And such another spot he would scarcely find in Old Ontario. Had they time to go in, Janet asked coaxingly, just a weenty, teenty bit of a minute? And perhaps they could get some flowers for the church, and a bouquet for old Mrs. Kennedy. Perhaps some trilliums would make her sing in her heart to the Lord.

He could not resist an appeal like this, so they scrambled out of the car and climbed the fence. They picked their

way along the side of the field, taking care not to step on the new fall wheat, which carpeted the earth with vivid green. Over another fence, and they were in the grove, and knee-deep in ferns and trilliums and wake-robins and wild geraniums; and treading upon a soft carpet of moss, starred with violets, purple, and gold, and white. Every blossom of early summer seemed to be here, from the white purity of the anemone on the edge of the wood, to the pink and gold ladies' slippers beside the stream. Away in the centre, still and aloof, guarded by its ring of blossoms, and canopied by its white-pillared birches, lay the opal mirror of the little pond.

The veeries were ringing their silver bells in the tree-tops; the mocking-bird was fairly spilling out melody from a bass-wood clump; the white-throat called down the golden aisles, "I-love-Canada! Canada! Canada"; and across the still surface of the pond came the longing, enticing, gentle "Dear-eee" of the wood pee-wee.

When they stepped into the green sanctuary, Janet whispered, as though she were entering the church. But as each new glory of blossoms broke upon her sight, she grew noisy with delight; and ran about like a wood nymph that had been imprisoned and just set at liberty.

She was so intoxicated with her sudden wealth that she wanted to gather everything in the grove. But when she had an armful for Mother, and another for Nellie's mother, and one for old Mrs. Kennedy, and one for Mrs. Murphy, and one for the Kellys, and the biggest of all for the church, and she still wanted to go on and gather more, her companion thought it was time to stop. She couldn't possibly take them all, he explained, and everyone in Cherry Hill had a garden. She was stooping to gather a long mauve plume of wild phlox, which she couldn't possibly resist, when the sound of far, soft voices made her raise her head enquiringly. "I hear somebody," she whispered.

She stood up, and looking down the sunlit path that led from the fields, gave an exclamation of joy. "Oh, oh, Mr. Balfour, there's Miss Lena," she cried. "Oh, I'm so glad!

Isn't it wonderful how we meet her so often on Saturdays?" she went on happily.

The young man was forced to agree with her. It really was quite wonderful and not a little embarrassing. Hugh Balfour was shy and retiring, and had the most modest opinion of his own attractions; and yet he would have been both blind and deaf if he had not noticed that Miss Lena Sinclair was, by some strange combination of accidents, always appearing on the scene, no matter where he went; and that her chief assistant in the matter of producing accidents was Mrs. Meldrum. This was the third Saturday that he and Janet had encountered her on their return to the village; and he felt that if the little girl had not been with him, he would have taken to his heels and run.

But the next moment he changed his mind completely. Janet gave another exclamation of joy. "Oh, oh, look, who's with her!" He looked, and there, down the green and golden aisle of the woods, the filtered sunlight dancing on her lovely uncovered head, came Sylvia Ward; and the unreasonable young man's feeling of resentment against the young woman who preceded her was suddenly changed to one of the warmest gratitude.

He stood quite still, overcome with the joy of her sudden appearance, and Janet flew to meet them.

"We are on our way up from Grandpa Sinclair's," Miss Lena explained, "and Sam had to see Henry Gibson, so we came in for flowers."

Hugh Balfour was but dimly conscious of what she said. The glad surprise of Sylvia's sudden appearance took away his breath. Janet caught Miss Lena's hand and dragged her away down the path toward the pond, to show her where the pitcher plants grew. The other two sat down on a mossy log.

"You ought to warn people!" he cried gaily. "It's overpowering when spring descends suddenly in the middle of winter!"

She seemed almost as happy as he. "I hadn't any warning myself. Grandmother wasn't well; and Bessie wrote

me I ought to come. So Alice and I motored out from Algonquin last night."

As he helped her gather the delicate lavender plumes of the phlox, she told him some wonderful news. Uncle and Aunt Ward, with whom she lived, were going away for the summer; and she was coming to her Grandmother's for part of the time, and to Cherry Hill for the remainder.

There was not much time for rejoicing over this good fortune, for soon Janet and Lena returned; and they all sat down on the mossy log again, to arrange their glorious harvest. Janet handed Mr. Balfour a little Jack-in-the-pulpit for a buttonhole bouquet, saying it was his special flower. "I can say a recitation about it," she remarked, "the one I said in school the time Aggie Wright's buttons flew away and Molly got the prize. Would you like me to speak it?" Everybody was delighted; and the three grown folk arranged themselves on the log, while Janet mounted a big mossy stone for the platform. The first bow was so low she lost her balance, and came scrambling down almost on top of the audience. But the second attempt, being less elaborate, was more successful. Then she recited the pretty verses, racing through them, as was her way, till she was out of breath.

"Jack-in-the-pulpit preaches to-day,
Under the green trees just over the way.
Squirrel and song sparrow,
High on their perch,
Hear the sweet lily-bells
Ringing for church."

It was a great success; and when it was finished the audience applauded till the sound of handclapping came echoing back across the little golden-green pond. Mr. Balfour held up the dainty little canopy, standing on its long, green pedestal. "Pencilled by Nature's hand black, brown and green."

"He's got such an agreeable sort of congregation," he said. "No wonder he can preach."

"But think what a comfortable sort of preacher the congregation has," said Sylvia Ward.

"We heard the wind-organ, the bee and the bird,
But from Jack-in-the-pulpit we heard not a word."

"So that's the sort of sermon you like, is it?" cried the young minister with a great show of indignation.

Lena Sinclair smiled deprecatingly; but Sylvia took another dainty spathe, and holding it up, addressed the little green-robed priest, solemnly.

"Preacher Jack," she said, shaking her finger at him, "you're the wisest clergyman it was ever my luck to meet; and your congregation is blessed above all other peoples. And the reason the birds and the flowers and the squirrels in this grove are so beautiful and so happy is because you are not everlastingly telling them their duty."

She paused, and Hugh Balfour took up the parable. "But what about the crows, Preacher Jack, that have been pecking at the little song-birds all summer? And the weasels in the holes, that eat up the little field-mice, and——"

"Leave the poor things alone, Preacher Jack!" interrupted Sylvia Ward. "They all have their place in the scheme of this grove. And why should you go fussing after black crows? You won't make them any whiter for all your trouble. They were intended to be black. So just stay where you are, and adorn your pretty pulpit, and be happy, and make everybody else so."

"For remember, Preacher Jack," put in the young minister, "that the whole aim and object in life is to be agreeable and look pleasant in a pretty pulpit."

There was a touch of bitterness in his voice. Her words had jarred on him. He held his calling as a sacred trust: the highest task to which a man could be summoned. It hurt him that she could speak lightly of it.

Janet came in with a welcome interruption.

"I think this place is just like a church," she said in a hushed tone, "and little Jack-in-the-pulpit is the preacher."

"And he's got such a lovely choir and organ," added Miss Lena, who had not quite followed Sylvia's parable, but felt there was something wrong. "Green fingers playing unseen on wind-lyres. Low-singing bird voices. These are his choirs."

"I hear them now," whispered Janet, standing motionless, and looking up into the far tree-tops where the sun flashed on a little chorister's coat. "Maybe he's the choir leader, like Charlie John Gibson. No, no, there he is!" as a clear ringing song of the white-throat came through the green aisles.

"That's Charlie John singing now!"

"It sounds exactly like Charlie John's voice," said Sylvia, her eyes dancing.

"And here's the Sunday School," said Lena. "Here's our class, Janet; this lovely little bunch of white violets."

"And that's you, Miss Lena, teaching us!" cried Janet, pointing to a tall graceful trillium.

"The Ladies' Aid ought to be here somewhere," suggested Sylvia. Janet sprang up and darted here and there in search of them.

"Oh, oh, here they are!" she cried, catching Hugh Balfour's hand and pulling him forward. "Look!" It was a big spider, spinning a silvery web, across a fairy dell. "They're quilting!" cried Janet, dancing around it. "That's the quilt!" She skipped away down the flowery aisles, finding new parallels at every turn. She came running back to them with the information that she had found the Elders: those old black crows who were cawing away so in the high pines, beyond the pond. They were having a session meeting right now! They all laughed heartily and apparently Jack-in-the-pulpit was forgotten for the time.

A loud honk, honk, from the road warned the girls that Sam had gone back to his car, and was waiting. And the four gathered up their flower harvest, and came out of the green and gold shadows into the sunlight. Hugh Balfour was very silent when the big car had started off and

they were following it up the slope to the village; and Janet, busy with her flowers, did not interrupt his thoughts.

"Don't you think Miss Lena is lovely, Mr. Balfour!" she exclaimed as she helped him put away the car in its little barn.

"Yes, she's a very fine, young, Christian woman," said Mr. Balfour, choosing his words carefully, in fear lest they be used against him one day when he came up before the bar of Janet's frankness. "A very fine Christian character," he amended carefully.

Janet did not seem satisfied. "Yes, but she's different from other Christian women, isn't she? I just love Miss Sylvia; and I think she sings, oh, just like the mocking-bird down in the grove! But I think Miss Lena's lovelier inside, don't you? I think she must sing sweeter inside her than Miss Sylvia. Don't you think so, Mr. Balfour?"

"Just look at those tulips, Janet!" he exclaimed hurriedly. "Isn't that red one a beauty. And here's Blackie coming to meet you."

She darted towards her pet, calling out endearing names; and the young man drew a breath of relief. He looked at the little figure dancing along ahead of him, the heavy black cat in her arms, her long braid swinging from side to side.

"She's positively uncanny," he said to himself. "I wonder if she's right?"

CHAPTER XIX

A JARRING NOTE

AS the day for the picnic approached, Janet, who never gave a thought to her own costume, except to hope that it would be an old one, grew more and more anxious over Molly's new pink muslin. And every day, coming home from school, if she caught a glimpse of the village dressmaker, she would call, "Have you started to make Molly's dress yet, Miss Sarah?"

And always Miss Sarah would say she hadn't finished young Mrs. Gibbie Gibson's blue dress, or red dress, or white dress; but she would soon be done.

"But you'll do Molly's next, won't you, Miss Sarah?" Janet asked one day, early in May, as she and Rosie and Nellie leaned over the fence. Molly had left school at Easter; and was working at the Sinclair's all the time now; and Janet felt it her duty to keep an eye on the dressmaker.

"I'm going to start it to-morrow," Miss Sarah announced. "I got to get it out o' the road," she added with a smile, "'cause Sylvia Ward's coming to Mrs. Andy's soon; an' she sent word ahead that she wants me to make her some clothes. And her with all them town dressmakers, and all the fine dresses she has! She always says to me, 'Sarah Kennedy,' says she, 'there's nobody that can make things over the way you can,' says she. 'There's nobody puts such stitching in it.' Them's just the words she said."

"But you'll finish Molly's before hers come, won't you?" pleaded Rosie; and once again Miss Sarah promised. Of course she would have it done, she assured them; there was no one who could slap a dress together as fast as she could, when she once got at it.

But in spite of her special skill and speed the very eve of the twenty-fourth of May arrived and Molly's dress had not come home. But it was certainly to be finished early on the morning of the twenty-fourth, Sarah promised; and Bud might come over for it as soon as he was out of bed; for it would be waiting for him.

The twenty-fourth of May was a glorious day. The village, and indeed the whole valley, was astir at dawn. Everyone took an early dinner and went to the grove immediately afterwards, so that they might have a long uninterrupted afternoon of perfect enjoyment, and still be home in time for a late milking.

Early in the morning the young men, headed by Mr. Balfour, went down to the grove to set up the tables and benches and make a platform for the choir and speakers. Mrs. Henry Gibson loaned her old kitchen stove, and Willie Gibson's girls their organ; and both were hauled over on the stone boat. The old stove was set up on the bank of the stream with two wash boilers ready for the tea; and the green aisles of the woods rang to the sound of hammering and the merry voices of the workers.

At the Manse everything was in the stir of preparation, too, for even Kirsty went to the picnic. It was her annual outing, her one festivity; and she took part in it with characteristic solemnity. Kirsty took her true place in the community on this day; for she always made the picnic tea. Whether it was that the pressure down at the grove was greater than up on Cherry Hill, no one knew; but the fact remained that no one but Kirsty McLeod could make the tea at the picnic without boiling it.

"It's not very hard to sing in your heart to-day, eh, Jenny Melody?" asked Mr. Balfour, as he met Janet dancing through the hall on his return from the grove.

"Oh! I don't think I'm singing," she cried. "I'm just screaming inside me! Mother says I may go over and see if Molly's dress has come yet!" she gasped, as she darted past him.

She had been in a fever of impatience all morning to get

away to the Kellys and see if the wonderful pink muslin had arrived; for Molly was not coming from Miss Lena's till it was almost time to go to the picnic; and had cautioned Rosie to have the new gown laid out and ready.

Janet ran down the tulip path behind the house, Pepper far ahead, barking at nothing at all, just from sheer joy. Through the blossoming orchard they flew, around by the little dandelion-fringed path behind the church; and they were at the Kellys' back door panting for breath.

The first glimpse of the family brought fear to Janet's heart. They were all gathered in the kitchen, except Tim and his father, who had gone down to the grove to help. Across the backs of the chairs hung the family wardrobe ready for the picnic: a clean blouse and tie for Tim, and one for Bud, Rosie's new blue dress that Molly had bought, with its beautiful ribbons, Jimsey's linen suit, freshly starched and ironed, and even a new white dress for Corny: but there was no sign of Molly's pink muslin; and Rosie and her mother were almost in tears.

"It ain't goin' to be finished after all, Jinny!" cried Rosie shrilly. "Old Sarah's a mean sneak, that's what she is!"

"Is she not going to have Molly's dress ready?" cried Janet in dismayed unbelief.

"No, that she isn't," wailed Mrs. Kelly. "Sarah was always the slow one; no wonder she never got a man. Sylvie Ward came up to Mrs. Andy's last night; and she brought two dresses for Sarah to fix. There's one for the picnic, and another one she wanted for the evening. Molly says that man from Algonquin, that has the big car, is comin' to see her; and nothing but that dress'll do her, and my girl has to go without. Poor Molly! And it was herself that wouldn't get a rag to put on her back, till we was all dressed up like the Prince o' Wales!" and Mrs. Kelly put her apron to her eyes.

"Didn't you tell her Molly hadn't anything else to wear, Bud?" asked Janet, snatching at a faint hope.

Bud winked desperately. "Yes, I did; an' she says she can't help it. I don't like that stuck-up Sylvia Ward; and

if her fellow comes to the picnic, me and Tim's goin' to stick tacks in his tires, so we are. An' Old Sarah pretendin' she hadn't time to make Molly's dress!" he went on in righteous indignation. "Why, it's most a year since we took it to her, ain't it, Jinny? and I wish we'd throwed Old Mother Murphy's boilin' soap all over her, that day, so I do!"

Just then the gate flew open and Tim came storming up the little path. He was roaring and singing and brought a new atmosphere to the desolate house. He had just returned from the grove, and Sam Sinclair was there and he had said that Molly would go to the picnic, anyway. "Sam's good and mad," declared Tim joyfully. "An' he told Lena that they'd got to get Molly ready, somehow. An' they're goin' to doll her up with a lot o' ribbons an' truck that girls wears."

"Well, half a loaf's better than no bread," said Mrs. Kelly, brightening with true Irish spirit. Janet could not quite appreciate the anguish of doing without a new dress even when you had expected one; so she, too, brightened visibly and ran home somewhat comforted.

Her own dress was the next difficulty she encountered. It was spread out on the bed ready for her when she returned. It was a new white one, another infliction of Aunt Flora's which had been blighting Janet's happiness ever since Mother brought it home at Easter. When her mother entered the room to see if Janet were getting ready, she found her standing regarding the pretty dress as a condemned criminal might look at the hangman's rope.

"Oh, Mother," she groaned, "if I have to take care of this dress all day I won't have time to do anything else! Can't I wear my blue gingham? Molly isn't going to wear her pink muslin. Did you know that Miss Sarah didn't finish it after all?"

But her mother was not to be diverted from the subject of Janet's own dress.

"Why, child, I'm sure I should think you would be

ashamed to be seen by the whole congregation in that old dress. It's faded and mended in three places."

"But, Mother," argued Janet, "I've heard you say ever so often that it's no disgrace to have a mended dress. You said it was a torn dress a person ought to be ashamed of; and the blue gingham is mended just lovely."

The argument was long and exhausting, but the white dress prevailed; and early in the afternoon a very uncomfortable little girl came slowly down the stairs carefully holding back the dainty skirt from possible contact with Pepper, who was trying to coax her into a frolic.

But when Janet arrived at the picnic grounds, and leaped out of Dr. Gillespie's car, with Nellie beside her, the burden of her white dress vanished.

The grove was alive with people, and ringing with the music of many voices. Away back by the pond that gleamed through the trees, the boys and men were laying out a course for the races. In the green pasture field beyond the trees the football club from Glenoro were running about kicking the ball. Janet could see Bud there, following the heroes about with silent adoration, content if one of the great men would so much as let him hold his coat.

Down in a denser part of the grove Gibson's old stove had been lit; and the smoke was curling up lazily from the pipe, far into the tree-tops. The shining boilers were already in place; and Kirsty was there in her whitest apron to see that no one dared to boil the tea. The platform was erected, benches placed before it, and the organ mounted upon it. Martha Beckett, seated on a block, was playing the organ, its notes sounding like a feeble mosquito in the great gothic arches of the woods. Charlie John Gibson had gathered a few of his choir together to try over one difficult selection before the crowd arrived; but, just as they struck the opening note, their voices were drowned in an overwhelming flood of rival music. And down the forest path came the piper who always played the opening notes of the Cherry Hill picnic, his kilt, his sporran, his trim buckled

shoes, his bonnet and plume and his pipe ribbons, all aquiver to the lilting, entrancing tune of "Bonnie Dundee."

From that moment Janet Meldrum, daughter of the Manse, carefully reared on psalm tunes and the catechism, went off at the heels of the piper; and neither her mother nor her minister could keep her within sight for the rest of that day.

It was almost tea time before the young minister could take a moment from his many duties to turn his footsteps in the direction he had been longing to take all afternoon. Just as soon as the sports in the pasture field were finished, he strolled across the grove in company with Miss Lena Sinclair, who had somehow been at his elbow all day, and joined the little group that surrounded Sylvia Ward. They found them in the little green nook where he had met her a few days before. Sylvia was seated on a moss-carpeted stone. She wore the pale green muslin that had been the price of Molly Kelly's new dress; her bronze hair was uncovered, and she looked like a beautiful rose, growing up in the forest, a perfect part of her surroundings. There were several young people with her; the Beckett girls, and the Gillespie girls, and young Fred Gillespie, who was home from college for the summer, assisting in his father's office.

Hugh Balfour flung himself down in the fragrant undergrowth, and drew a great sigh of content. There was a pleasant clatter of dishes from the long white tables and fragrant whiffs of tea from the old stove from which the smoke curled lazily into the tree-tops. Far away down the green aisles the piper's notes rang sweet and clear; while over at the edge of the pasture field Henry Gibson's cattle could be seen standing pressed against the fence, enchanted by the music.

While the little group were sitting chatting they were discovered by Janet. In her wanderings after the piper, Janet had met with various adventures that had left her in rather sad disarray. Bud had forsaken her for the boys on the football field; but Lennie and Nellie had followed

her faithfully all day. Yet Lennie was still neat and his clothes were untarnished. Nellie, too, was almost as tidy as when she left home. Her golden curls were smooth, her pretty white dress was fairly clean, and her sash was neatly tied.

But from the top of her tousled head to the tip of her muddy shoes Janet was a wreck; and looked as if she had been at a continuous picnic for a week. Her face was crimson with excitement and heat and hard work; for she had won two races and been a vigorous also-ran in a couple of others. She had swung to the tree tops in all the swings, many times over; had ridden fourteen revolutions upon the merry-go-round; and had dogged the piper's steps through the woods, until her marching had measured miles. She had slipped into the creek; and her white shoes had turned a dark green. The embroidered flounce of the white dress had parted company with the remainder of her costume and had been pinned up in front by Nellie's well-meaning but unskilful fingers, with a large and very conspicuous safety pin. Her blue sash, which had given such a deep colour to her big grey eyes, was now a small thin string around her waist, and its tails were dangling at the side. Her hair was in a wild confusion of waves and curls, and hung over one eye; and the bow that had confined her heavy braid was gone altogether.

But, as usual, Janet was blissfully unconscious of her appearance; and as they came within sight of her group of friends, she started towards them.

"Oh, there's Miss Lena! Let's go and ask her why Molly hasn't come yet!" she cried.

Nellie looked down at her dress which was not as fresh as she would have liked. She was a very tidy little girl and felt abashed unless she was sure every hair and shoelace was in its right place. "I don't like to go," she said, pausing in the pathway. "Don't let us, Janet."

"Why?" asked Janet in surprise.

"Oh, I feel so untidy, I'm ashamed."

Quite oblivious of her own terrible appearance, Janet

looked Nellie all over. "Do you?" she asked, interested. "I never felt untidy in my life. I've often felt tidy, though, and it's an awful feeling—just as if you couldn't breathe."

"Well, I like to feel tidy," declared Lennie, in his superior way. "And if you don't feel untidy now, Jenny, it's pretty queer."

But Janet was moving forward all unabashed; and her two satellites followed. Mr. Balfour hailed them joyfully. He had not seen Janet since he had pinned the first prize badge on her some hours earlier.

"Hello, Jenny Melody!" he called. "Where have you been all day?"

"Oh, my goodness, Janet Meldrum!" cried Martha Beckett. "Wait till your mother sees you! She'll take a fit. Sakes alive, keep away from Sylvia! There's water dripping off your dress."

Janet stepped hastily back; but Mr. Balfour caught her little brown hand; and, motioning to the other two, he soon had the three children clustered around him.

"Your dress looks as if you had been having a really good time," he said approvingly. "Now tell us how many prizes you got."

Janet brightened. "Two firsts in the races, and the prize was a doll and a book, and they both fell into the creek," she added sadly.

"But Nellie got a prize, too; and it's a lovely handkerchief."

"Janet got a prize for bouncing a ball," added Nellie generously.

"And who got a prize for eating the most ice-cream?" asked Nellie's big brother, who was lying stretched upon the flowery ground in front of Sylvia Ward.

"I ate the most!" cried Lennie, relieved to discover at last a sphere in which he shone. "I had three cones and two dishes."

"Janet had three cones, too," cried Nellie, "but she gave one to Bud Kelly, and another to the baby."

"And it gave the baby the stomachache," said Janet ruefully.

"I took the highest swing of anybody!" cried Lennie, rising once more into prominence.

"Come now, think of something else you've excelled in, Janet," urged Mr. Balfour.

Janet looked around to see if she could recall any further achievement; and finally added boastfully:

"I'm sure I've got the dirtiest dress!"

The laughter that arose at this was not in the least disconcerting to Janet. She laughed, too, and then, remembering her errand, cried, "Oh, Miss Lena, where's Molly?"

Lena Sinclair turned to her cousin. "Sylvie, where's Molly? She was to come in the car with you and Sam."

"Molly?" Miss Sylvia seemed trying to remember. "Was I to bring her? I forgot. I left her ironing."

Janet gasped in dismay. "Isn't she coming at all?"

Sylvia laughed and took hold of Janet's long braid. "What a greedy little girl. You must have everybody in Cherry Hill at your picnic. Molly will be along, you may be sure. You couldn't keep a Kelly away from a picnic."

Miss Lena looked worried. "She ought to be here, girls. Sam went back for some more cream and he'll surely bring her."

Janet and Nellie wandered back to the road; they found Rosie there watching for her sister. At last they were rewarded by the sight of the Sinclair car coming bumping down from the road. The three little girls ran to meet it, to find only Sam.

"Molly wouldn't come," he explained, as they gathered clamorously about him. He had coaxed her, but Sylvia had left her with a lot of ironing to do, and it wasn't finished. Some folks had too many clothes, that was Sam's opinion, and he strode away from them looking very cross indeed.

The three little girls strolled back alone to the supper tables. Molly wasn't coming! Rosie was almost in tears, and Janet was quite as distressed. After all Molly's hopes of being at the picnic in her pink muslin, she hadn't come

at all! A pall hung over the remainder of the day. Even the piper's magic notes could not dispel the gloom.

Janet rode home between her mother and Mr. Balfour and poured out the big disappointment of the day. And it was some small comfort to find that Mr. Balfour seemed almost as worried over Molly's absence as she was.

CHAPTER XX

A DIFFICULT PIECE OF MUSIC

MOLLY explained tearfully on Sunday. Miss Sylvia had come home and Sarah Kennedy had to hurry with a dress she brought; and so the pink muslin could not be finished. Then Molly had to do a big ironing for Miss Sylvia; and by the time it was finished Sam had to go to the picnic without her. Mrs. Sinclair had made her dress up and go out and watch at the gate for "a chance," but none came. Everybody had gone to the picnic early. And then it was milking time, and so Molly did not get away at all. She had no blame for anyone. Miss Sylvia was a creature set so far above ordinary mortals that Molly did not dream of judging her.

But that picnic day proved only a forerunner of the summer days ahead. Molly could never come home for even a visit. There was always a pair of white shoes to clean for Miss Sylvia, or a ripped glove to mend, and Molly was so careful and deft, it was very convenient to give her everything to do. And Miss Sylvia was so lovely that Molly was a willing slave. She was always being rewarded for a long day's ironing by the gift of an old scarf, or a discarded bit of ribbon, or a box of chocolates, when Mr. Hilton brought a couple from town.

Janet's chattering tongue reported all Molly's troubles; and though she herself did not recognise their cause, Hugh Balfour could not shut his eyes to it.

"Mother, Molly can't come to Mission Band," she said one day at dinner. "And Rosie can't go unless she takes the baby; and can't I go over and help her carry him to church?"

Mrs. Meldrum was very much averse to Janet's carrying the Kelly baby.

"Dear me, does Mrs. Sinclair never let poor Molly come home any more?" she asked.

"Not on Mondays, 'cause that's wash-day," Janet explained. "And Tuesday Molly has to iron Miss Sylvia's white dresses; and Wednesday that Mr. Hilton always comes out, and——"

"I wouldn't talk so much, dear, if I were you," said her mother hastily.

"But you asked me, Mother, and I was just telling you," declared Janet reasonably.

"Well, eat your dinner, dear, and never mind about Molly."

"But can't I help Rosie with the baby, Mother?"

"I shall see. Don't ask any more questions just now."

Hugh Balfour had been sitting silent, turning over the crisp lettuce on his plate without seeing it. Janet regarded him anxiously.

"Did you find a worm on your lettuce, Mr. Balfour?" she asked in deep solicitude. "Nellie's father found a great, big, fat, green worm——"

"Janet!" cried her mother, horrified. "How can you speak of anything so disgusting at the table?"

"But he did, Mother dear, really!" she declared. "It was a new kind of salad Marjorie made; she learned it at school, but she forgot to look over the lettuce, and—Oh, Mother, do let me tell the rest!"

Mrs. Meldrum moved her hands in a despairing gesture; and, as it was not an actual prohibition, and Mr. Balfour was looking at her with inviting eyes, Janet rushed on.

"And there was a big green worm on Dr. Gillespie's plate; and the others were all through supper; and he was having his alone; 'cause he'd been away Down Below seeing Mrs. Jimmie McArthur's baby. And—there's not much more, Mother——" she added encouragingly. "And that Mr. Nelson that comes to see Marjorie was coming up the walk; and Nellie's papa was so angry that he threw

the salad out of the dining-room window; and it hit Mr. Nelson right in the face, and——”

“Janet!”

“I’m just finishing, Mother,” she gasped anxiously. “And Nellie says her papa says it served Marjorie right ’cause it’d show Mr. Nelson what was ahead of him. What did he mean by that, Mother? I’d think it would keep him from seeing anything ahead of him; ’cause the mustard got into his eyes; and Nellie said he cried all the time he was there. And Marjorie cried, too, after he was gone,” she added rather sadly.

“Oh, Janet!” her mother burst out despairingly. “I never let you go anywhere, even down to Nellie’s, without your coming home with some ridiculous story——”

But Hugh Balfour was laughing unrestrainedly; and, much relieved, Janet laughed with him.

“Dr. Gillespie’s temper is a very uncertain quantity,” remarked Mrs. Meldrum, when Janet had been sent to the kitchen for the hot water which Kirsty invariably forgot. “But I did not know it carried him to such extremes. What in the world started the child on that dreadful tale?”

Mr. Balfour offered no explanation; and was saved from replying by the return of the child herself, very anxious to tell more about Molly’s troubles, and prevented only by her mother’s firmest refusal.

But for the next week they were all driven from Janet’s mind by a new excitement, second only to the picnic itself. The ladies of all the missionary societies within a wide district decided to have a convention about the end of June, and Cherry Hill was honoured as the place of meeting.

Those were busy days for Knox Church. There were nearly fifty delegates from a distance to be accommodated with beds and meals for two days, and one night; and there was to be an indefinite throng for supper in the church both evenings. So it was no wonder that for a week before the event you could smell lemon pies and layer-cake baking all up and down the valley. It was the very best time for a meeting in Cherry Hill, for the gardens

were all abloom, and the Caldwell peonies were a sight worth a journey across the country.

To Janet's great joy they were to have two delegates, ladies from West Hampton, which was no village, but a big town with a handsome church which she had visited once with her father. Janet was anxious that she should not do anything very dreadful, to bring disgrace upon Knox Church while they were with them. For, coming from town, and from a rich church like the West Hampton one, they would very likely be very grand ladies. And being delegates to a Missionary Convention, they would of course be very, very good.

She was in bed when they arrived, and did not meet them until the next morning at breakfast. She sat opposite them, glancing at them with big grave eyes, speaking only when she was spoken to, and then as briefly as possible, and apparently absorbed in her bowl of porridge and milk. She behaved so very well, indeed, that one of the ladies said to Mr. Balfour in a low tone, which Janet heard distinctly, wasn't she a dear wee mouse, and such a good, quiet child! And Mr. Balfour was such a gentleman he did not even allow his eyes to twinkle when he answered that she was indeed a very good, little girl.

But just because Janet had to be quiet, she used up her energies in seeing and hearing and understanding in an uncanny manner everything that was going on. She could have described the delegates' clothes to the last thread and button, had she been asked. She saw that Mrs. Wallace, the handsome stout lady, wore a very magnificent purple dress with a lovely white satin front, and long earrings of some dazzling purple stones; and that the jewels of the brooch in the lace at her neck were exactly the same shape and colour as those in the earrings. And she saw that Miss Henderson was small and pale and held her head on one side like a little sparrow; that she was dressed in grey, and wore a great many pretty rings that sparkled delightfully. She noted, too, that Miss Henderson smiled a great

deal ; but smiled most at Mr. Balfour ; for which Janet rather liked her the more.

Directly after prayers, Mr. Balfour was called to the telephone ; and while the ladies still lingered at the table Mrs. Wallace said :

"I'm so glad this young minister of yours is going to speak, Mrs. Meldrum. You know, our dear old Dr. McClelland is looking for an assistant. He wishes to retire soon. The dear old gentleman is deaf and all worn out, and should have retired ten years ago. And my husband, you know, Mrs. Meldrum, being an elder——"

"And one whose word goes a long way indeed," said Miss Henderson with an admiring chirp.

Mrs. Wallace smiled deprecatingly, and her earrings winked prettily. "J. D. does try to use his spare time helping all he can," she admitted. "He heard Mr. Balfour once in Toronto last year, you know. We were down at the Exhibition and he preached in St. Luke's ; and when we were coming out of church, J. D. said to me, 'Agnes, when Dr. McClelland resigns, that's the young man we must have in West Hampton.' Those were the very words he said. 'That's the young man we must have in West Hampton.' And last Easter when he preached over in Algonquin, J. D. and two of our managers motored over to hear him. Of course this is strictly between ourselves ; but when Mr. Balfour is through, there will be no doubt about where he will be called."

Mrs. Meldrum listened eagerly. She wished Hugh had not been quite so precipitate in volunteering for the foreign mission field. West Hampton was a very wealthy and prominent church.

"I suppose you know that Mr. Balfour has offered himself for foreign work?" she asked hesitatingly.

Mrs. Wallace's earrings twinkled knowingly. "We heard that, but——" she nodded and smiled, and Miss Henderson nodded and smiled also. The smiles said quite plainly that no wise young man would choose India or China in preference to West Hampton.

When Mr. Balfour returned from the telephone, Mrs. Wallace leaned towards him, her earrings shaking dazzlingly.

"I liked what you said in the discussion last night, Mr. Balfour. I agree with you that we need more young men in the ministry. West Hampton, now, needs a young man. Dr. McClelland himself says so." She looked at him meaningly.

"Perhaps Mr. Balfour might suggest one for us," chirped Miss Henderson, and smiled more fascinatingly than ever.

"I don't think West Hampton needs any suggestions," said Mrs. Wallace archly. "My husband and several other officials have made up their minds already."

Mr. Balfour looked very uncomfortable, Janet thought. "I may as well tell you they are going to approach you, when you graduate," Mrs. Wallace said softly.

"That's very flattering," he said, looking still more uncomfortable. "But I—my work—I'm afraid——" he hesitated. "I'm afraid my work may take me far away from here."

"Are you looking towards some post-graduate work?" asked Miss Henderson in the hope of drawing him into a confession.

"I am not sure," he stammered. "My plans are not yet made. I am undecided what I shall do when I graduate."

Mrs. Meldrum looked across the table at the young man in some surprise. She was puzzled. This was not like Hugh, this state of indecision. But twelve years as a minister's wife had taught her the value of silence. She said nothing, but she thought of Sylvia Ward.

When Janet came home from school in the afternoon there was only Kirsty in the house. Everyone else was at the church. Her mother had said that if she would smooth her hair, and change her dress, and wash her face, and make herself nice and tidy, she might come over to the meeting at the church, too. So she tore a dress down from a hook in her closet and put it on, all unconscious that it was one that had to be mended. Her mother had laid one out on the bed for her; but she did not see it. She gave her hair a rake with the brush; and, without looking at

herself in the glass, she ran downstairs. And as she reached the bottom step the bell rang.

Kirsty popped her head in through the door leading to the kitchen, and whispered fiercely:

"See who yon is at the door, Jinit; an' tell them we'll no lend them another hate!" and the door slammed emphatically.

Janet had been accustomed all her life to the wholesale borrowing from the Manse that arose whenever there was a festivity at the church; and she accepted it as a part of every social function. But Kirsty rebelled and gave out everything with a grudging hand.

Janet opened the door to find Lennie's mother, and Susie Beckett's mother, and young Mrs. Gibbie Gibson on the step.

She met them with a pleasant smile. "If you please," she said, addressing Lennie's mother, "if it's something you want to borrow for the supper, Mother's at the church, and I'm afraid Kirsty won't lend it to you."

Mrs. Beckett was a stout, jolly woman and she laughed aloud. "No, I'll bet she won't," she cried. "I know Kirsty, and all her forebears! But all we want is to borrow a chair for five minutes' rest. We're dead tired, Janet; and your mother told us to come over here and rest in the quiet."

Janet showed them into the big empty parlour, very cordially. Young Mrs. Gibbie Gibson giggled over Kirsty; but Mrs. Caldwell was inclined to be resentful.

"I think Kirsty takes a great deal upon herself for a servant, Janet," she remarked, as she sank into an easy chair, and fanned herself with a newspaper. "And so I have told your mother many a time."

"But Kirsty isn't a servant," said Janet wonderingly.

"She isn't? What is she, then, I'd like to know?"

Janet pondered this. "I— Oh, I guess she's the manager of us all. I know she makes us all mind; even Mr. Balfour is afraid of her if he comes in late for meals."

"Well, well," declared Mrs. Caldwell. "That's not the

way servants act in the old country. I always knew she didn't know her place."

"That's what Kirsty always says about the Ladies' Aid," said Janet, having no idea of the exact meaning of the phrase.

Young Mrs. Gibbie Gibson was in a spasm of giggles by this time; and Mrs. Beckett said, "Run and get us a drink of water, Lassie; perhaps Kirsty will spare us that much."

Janet came back with a tray, holding a pitcher and three tumblers. Kirsty had given her the second best glasses, that were used every day, and an old blue pitcher with a crack in it. When Kirsty did not approve of a visitor, she had her own way of showing it; and had been known to send in the kitchen cups and saucers, when Mrs. Meldrum was serving tea to an unwelcome guest.

But Janet would not have noticed anything wrong if Kirsty had sent her in with the tin pail and the dipper, and she carried the tray in quite happily.

As she came to the door with it the ladies were deep in a conversation.

"You can tell by her clothes she's wealthy. Her husband's a lumber merchant and as rich as a Jew," young Mrs. Gibbie Gibson was saying. "They pay half the minister's salary, they say. And they're keen for him."

"Hump," said Mrs. Beckett, taking a long drink. "Then he'll go; you mark my word. Our Martha says that you-know-who won't have him if he goes among the heathens; and that he kind o' guesses that."

"I didn't believe he'd be the kind to be turned away from his duty," said Mrs. Caldwell solemnly. "When the Lord has called a young man it's a solemn thing for him to disobey."

"Maybe he hadn't made up his mind," said Mrs. Beckett, in her good-natured way. "He never said anything about it to anybody."

"He that putteth his hand to the plough and looketh back," quoted Mrs. Caldwell solemnly.

Janet passed the glasses, listening intently. She knew

whom they were talking about, just as well as if their names had been shouted to her.

"She's not the right kind of a wife for a minister, anyhow," said Mrs. Beckett. "She's all right, I've no doubt, but we were all thinking,—and our Martha, too,—that it would be the other one."

"It ain't the other one's fault, anyhow," giggled Mrs. Gibbie Gibson.

"Poor thing!" exclaimed Mrs. Beckett.

"It was always that way, Gib says," declared Mrs. Gibbie Gibson. "Ever since those girls was kids, and went to school here together. Whatever one wanted the other always got, clothes and everything. And now it's a man."

Mrs. Caldwell arose. "You two stay here; I must run over home for a minute and look after Grandpa. But I do say that if any man allows a girl to turn him aside from the work to which the Lord has called him, he is not worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven. We have Scripture for it."

Janet went out with Mrs. Caldwell. As they went down the steps together she put her hand into that of Lennie's mother confidently. "Mrs. Caldwell," she said, "won't Miss Sylvia marry Mr. Balfour if he goes away to India to be a missionary?"

Mrs. Caldwell looked for a moment as though she were about to faint; then her face grew crimson. "Oh, Janet! It wasn't right of Mrs. Beckett and Mrs. Gibson to be talking about Mr. Balfour that way," she stammered, trying to remember in dismayed haste, just what she had said herself, an exercise in which Janet could have been of great assistance to her. "But you won't mention it, will you, like a good, little girl?"

"Oh, no, I won't tell on you," said Janet generously. "But I—I don't want Mr. Balfour to go away so far. Do you think she'll make him stay?"

"I think we'd better not talk about it, Janet," said the lady hurriedly, "and don't even think about it, please, dear. There's been too much said already. Dear, dear, who would

have thought?" and she hurried away across the village street in great trepidation.

Nevertheless Janet did a great deal of thinking upon the subject. She feared it might be wrong; but she could not help hoping Miss Sylvia would make him stay home. She went over to the church and sat beside her mother and listened to the missionary addresses. She was quite sure that Mr. Balfour's was the best, and was very much pleased to find that Mrs. Wallace agreed with her.

"That young man's inspired," the delegate whispered to Mrs. Meldrum, as they came down the aisle together; and the tears in her eyes made her earrings look pale. "I covet him for West Hampton; but if he wants to go to the foreign field neither J. D. nor I will put a straw in his way!"

The delegates left the next afternoon. As Janet hurried home from school she found them in the hall with suitcases and bags. Cars stood at the door, and Mrs. Wallace and Miss Henderson were bidding her mother and Mr. Balfour good-bye. They patted Janet on the head and kissed her, and declared she was the quietest and best little girl they had ever seen.

Mrs. Wallace held Mr. Balfour's hand a long time.

"I should like to think that this wasn't a farewell," she said, smiling up at him. "But after last night's address, I couldn't find it in my heart to influence you in any way. You must go where you are led. God bless you."

Mr. Balfour's face was pale and Janet looked up at him in sudden anxiety.

"Thank you for your interest. I hope—I cannot say yet what I shall do." His voice was very low, his manner humble.

He went back into the study; and all evening Janet watched in vain for the inviting flag. She wondered why it was not out, for Mr. Balfour was surely not studying. She could hear him tramping up and down, up and down the room; and hoped Kirsty would not hear him, or he would surely get a scolding for wearing out the carpet.

But long after Janet and even Kirsty were deep in sleep, the steady tramp continued.

CHAPTER XXI

MIDSUMMER MUSIC

JANET was seated on the back steps doing penance for a morning of too much joy. By dint of a great deal of coaxing and arguing she had managed to get away on a hilarious expedition with Bud and Rosie, over fences and across fields in search of ground plums. They had brought home very little fruit; but Janet had gathered a great variety and number of burrs which she had carried home in her hair.

She had seated herself upon the kitchen steps, and was fairly tearing out her hair in her despairing efforts to be rid of them.

School had been closed for a week. While Janet had planned to make strenuous efforts to sing and make melody in her heart through the long dreary days of separation from her companions, like most grown folk she had found the future not half so bad as the anticipation of it.

For one reason, Mr. Balfour had decided not to take his holidays until her father's return; a decision for which old Mr. Gibbie Gibson commended him highly. He had never been able to understand, he declared, why preachers should find it necessary to leave their work and spend every summer in idleness. He himself had worked hard for fifty years and had never taken a day off; and it was contrary to the Scripture, too; for where would you read of the Apostle Paul quitting his preaching and going away off to Corinth or Athens for a holiday? It was clean ridiculous.

Then besides Mr. Balfour's ever delightful company, Janet had the steadily growing hope of her father's return

early in the autumn. His health was almost completely restored; and he hoped to start for Cherry Hill before the summer ended.

And then there were all sorts of delightful doings in the village of which the Manse seemed the centre. So many young people were home for their holidays. There were Isabel and Fred Gillespie, and John Gibbie Gibson, who was learning to be a minister, and fairly followed Mr. Balfour about. There were Lennie's big sister and brother, and a dozen others, all of whom made the village a very lively place indeed. And best of all, Miss Lena's sister Annie was home from school and Miss Sylvia spent most of her time with them.

There was a constant coming and going, and so many callers for Mr. Balfour that Janet was kept running to answer the bell, an exercise that gave her much joy. Mr. Balfour had been steadily gathering about him a following of young men, and Lennie's brother and Nellie's brother, and Sam Sinclair and all the Gibson boys were always coming to the Manse to consult him. Even Bud's father, who never went to church and said all ministers were hypocrites, was not above shambling up to the Manse to confer with one of the despised class regarding the loan of a dollar or two for an indefinite period at no interest.

So the holidays were very lively and pleasant indeed; and as her mother was more than usually busy, Janet found more opportunity to go abroad with the Kellys in search of adventure.

But to-day's expedition had been too joyous, and now she was paying the penalty. Pulling burrs out of one's hair was a very painful operation; and Janet had bravely tried the silent singing as an antidote. But it proved inadequate, so to keep up her flagging spirits she was trying audible singing, and was rendering her favourite, "The Holy City," at the top of her voice, to a rather doubtful melody, interspersed with still louder groans and exclamations of distress.

Mr. Balfour, who had been working at the car in the

back shed, heard the mistaken musician, and came to the rescue of the listeners.

"Why, Jenny Melody," he cried, unable to suppress his laughter; "what's all the row about? Have you been standing on your head in the burr patch?"

"I wish I was bald headed, like old Mrs. Gibbie Gibson," declared Janet desperately, jerking her matted locks into a hopeless tangle.

He sat down on the steps beside her, and tried to assist.

"It really is a rather bad plight," he said sympathetically. "But think how funny you would look without any hair, when you are grown up."

"I wouldn't care," said Janet, feeling in an argumentative mood. "I could wear a wig, and I could leave it at home when I went out to play. Lennie's aunt, that's visiting them now, has a wig. She said I had a fortune in my hair. What did she mean by that, Mr. Balfour?"

"Oh, some prophetic remark of the lady's, I suppose." Then, seeing she was regarding him earnestly through the tangled screen of her hair, he felt ashamed. He strove never to answer her evasively as her mother so often did.

"She meant that when you grow up, you will be glad your hair is so long," he added, "because all you ladies like to have beautiful hair."

"Is that all?" she answered, quite disappointed. "I thought perhaps she meant that I could get it cut off, and sell it for a lot of money, and be rich."

"I suppose I oughn't to mind having it, though," she went on, more resigned; for Mr. Balfour's fingers were very gentle; and the burrs were yielding to his touch, without producing anguish. "I suppose I have to have some troubles. But if I just had new ears so that I could sing like Miss Sylvia, and my hair cut off short like Bud's, I'd be perfectly happy. Everybody's got something about them they don't want, I guess. What would you like cut off you most, Mr. Balfour?"

Mr. Balfour thought that if he had his face cut off, and his temper amputated, and had an operation on his brains,

and some new grey matter inserted, he would be able to start life with fresh enthusiasm. Janet laughed in spite of the burrs.

"Everybody in the world, nearly, has something the matter with them," she declared, growing grave again over a very painful snarl. "I've got my hair, and Nellie has spelling, and poor Daddy has sickness, and Mother has meetings, and even Miss Lena's got something the matter with her. I don't know what it is, but I'm afraid she can't sing in her heart all the time. I don't think Miss Sylvia has anything wrong with her though. I'm glad she's here, aren't you? I guess Miss Sylvia and you are the only persons I know, Mr. Balfour, that hasn't got something the matter."

She peered at him through the tangle of curls. "Oh, I do believe you're just perfect, aren't you?" she exploded.

"Oh, Jenny Melody!" he cried, laughing helplessly. "If you only guessed how many, many things I've got that are all wrong!" He grew suddenly grave. For there was something the matter with him which little Janet could not guess: something so seriously wrong that it threatened to spoil his whole life.

But Janet was again on the painful subject of her hair. "I wonder if it would be very wicked to pray that the Lord would cut my hair off? Do you think He wouldn't like me to ask Him for something Mother didn't want me to have? What would God do if Mother and I were asking Him for different things? He'd get all mixed up, wouldn't He?"

Mr. Balfour said it was very hard for God to manage things unless His servants were of one mind. And that was one reason why it was especially necessary for people in the same family to agree on all things. He sighed heavily when he said this, and Janet echoed the sigh.

"I hardly ever agree with Mother about what I'm to wear," she confessed sadly. "But I do wish she'd let me pray to have my hair cut off. I could let it grow again, when I get big like Miss Lena. Don't you think she has lovely hair, Mr. Balfour?"

"Just listen to those little roosters trying to crow, Janet!" he cried suddenly, catching at the first means of escaping the embarrassing question. He drew a breath of relief as Janet laughed.

"Why, they're practising," she cried delightedly. "It's choir practice, and they're learning to sing!"

They certainly needed to practise, for they were a long way from a respectable crow. One little fellow let forth a discordant squall; another sounded as if he were choking; and the noisiest of the choir uttered something like a bad, consumptive cough.

"They can't sing any better than I can," declared Janet. "If they ever learn to crow, I don't see why I couldn't learn to sing; if folks would let me practise as much as they do."

"Well," said Mr. Balfour, carefully extracting a particularly stubborn burr, "I'm sure you could do better than that fellow. He sounds as if he had the whooping cough."

Janet imitated the ridiculous sounds; and Mr. Balfour stopped hunting for burrs and looked at her with sudden interest. "Do that again, Janet," he said. Janet did it again very willingly, many times over; and he cried out joyously:

"Why, that was perfect! I wouldn't be surprised to hear you singing as soon as those little fellows learn to crow."

"Oh, my!" cried Janet, her eyes shining through her hair. "I'm going to practise, too," and she took to crowing like the chickens, making such a good imitation that Kirsty came out, indignantly, to see what all the ructions were about.

"Never mind, Jenny Melody," Mr. Balfour said comfortingly, when Janet was forced to be silent though the chickens continued practising louder than ever. "Your ear is waking up; and you'll be a singer yet, never fear."

The last burr was extracted after much patient labour; and, overcome with gratitude, Janet ran away upstairs to have her hair combed.

"Oh, Mother," she cried joyously, "Mr. Balfour says my ears are growing. I can crow now, just as well as Buffy's chickens, and I'm going to learn to sing some day; he says I will."

When her hair was at last confined in its long heavy braid, and she had been warned against further excursions among briars and burrs, Janet burst forth against her chief impediment.

"Mother, don't you think it's awful to have hair like mine? I'm sure the Lord wouldn't mind if I asked Him to let me have it cut off; not if you didn't mind. Would you care very much, Mother?" And because her mother had an unusually busy afternoon ahead of her she answered hurriedly:

"Well, well, dear, it will do no harm to pray over it if you want to; now run away like a good little girl and practise your scales."

That night Janet prayed fervently that the burden of her hair might be removed, a prayer that was answered in a very short time, and in a manner of which she could not have dreamed.

And the very next day her oft-repeated prayer that she might be able to sing received the beginning of its answer. It was at Sunday School that this great event happened. During the week news of terrible import had been coming from the Mother Land across the sea. Europe had burst into flames, and the heat of the conflagration was felt even in far-off Canada.

On Sunday morning, at the opening of Sunday School, Willie Beckett spoke to the school about the war, and Britain's part in it: a part that Canada was sure to uphold. He spoke solemnly, and the children listened, thrilled and yet fearful. At the end of his little address, he said: "And now, we will all stand and sing one verse of 'O Canada!'"

The school rose to its feet. Young, care-free voices were raised in song. They sang it loudly and cheerfully, as they had always done; and there fell upon them no faintest shadow, no dimmest premonition, that there were gallant

young hearts raised there in careless song, that would soon be called to redeem with their life-blood the pledge they were uttering:

“O Canada, we stand on guard for thee!”

It was absolutely impossible for Janet to stand silent through this ceremony. Many a time, in school, when they sang, “O Canada,” she had been compelled to put her hands tight over her mouth to keep back the sound that surged forth. But to-day nothing could stem its flood. She just had to sing. She forgot all about her ear and her voice, and stood up straight and proud, and sang at the top of her voice.

Miss Lena walked beside her on the way home from church; and she turned to Mr. Balfour, who was just behind, and said:

“Do you know that Janet sang to-day, right out loud, and there was scarcely a mistake in the tune?”

“I knew she could!” he cried, “when I heard her crow the other day!”

Janet could hardly wait till she got home to put her voice to the test. Mr. Balfour was almost as excited. He sat down at the piano and played a little hymn, and she followed carefully.

When she had finished he gave a shout of joy.

“Jenny Melody, you can sing! That was almost true!”

Janet stood perfectly still and looked at him speechless.

“Oh, oh! Was it really truly, sure-enough?” she whispered at last.

It appeared that it really was. Janet did not learn to sing at once, though she had great hopes of being equal to Sylvia Ward in a few days. Indeed she did not learn to follow a tune correctly for a very long time; but she was capable of learning; her slowly awakened ear had begun to distinguish shades of sound at last. She was so delighted with her new-found talent, and so anxious to perfect it, that she assiduously practised scales with her

voice when she played them on the piano, and constantly practised the "Holy City" in the intervals; all of which caused her mother more worry than Janet's former lack of musical ability, and often drove Mr. Balfour to shut the study door and put his hands over his ears to make sermonising possible.

CHAPTER XXII

LENNIE STARTS A CHORUS

EARLY one morning, during the last week of the holidays, Lennie, in his best blouse and most highly polished boots, came up the Manse walk to the front door and rang the bell. Janet, who was up in an apple tree accompanying Alice on her visit to the Mock Turtle, witnessed this extraordinary formality with amazement. This must surely be a new kind of play that Lennie had invented; and she proceeded to take her place on the stage at once. She shouted to him to wait; and leaping down from the tree, she ran round to the kitchen door, and in through the back hall. And before Kirsty had time to dry her hands, she was opening the door to Lennie.

He stood there, hat in hand. Janet did not know what to do next. This was a situation such as she had never met before, but Lennie gave her her cue.

"Good morning," he said politely. "Is Mrs. Meldrum in?"

Janet was delighted. It *was* a play; she was perfectly at home now. "I believe she is," she said in a tone that far outdid his in politeness. "Won't you please walk in?" Lennie stepped carefully into the hall. He was merely carrying out his mother's instructions, and was rather overcome by Janet's manner.

She showed him into the parlour elaborately. "Won't you please sit down," she said, "and I'll see if Mrs. Meldrum is in." Then she had a sudden fruitful memory from a book she and Nellie had found in Marjorie's room, and read on a rainy day. "I'm not sure if she's back from the opera yet," she added.

She stepped into the hall; but suddenly bounced back, fired with another inspiration from "The Marriage of Gwendoline."

"What name shall I say?" she asked.

Lennie was a smart little boy; he suddenly realised that Janet was playing a part. He, too, had read the "Marriage of Gwendoline."

"Lord Lionel Barrington," he announced, without winking an eye.

Janet was so impressed that she forgot her rôle.

"Oh, goodness me!" she exclaimed in artless admiration.

Encouraged by his success, Lennie dropped his star part and became stage director.

"That isn't the way to do it at all, Janet," he said, in the superior way that Lennie had. "You should say, 'Will you please give me your card?'"

"But what would you have a card for?" argued Janet. "Are you playing Christmas?"

"It's a calling card," explained Lennie in disgust. "That's the way stylish people do it all the time. They never go to see each other without they give away ever and ever so many cards."

"I'd like that if they were pretty like Christmas cards or valentines. Hurrah out, and let's play it in the orchard."

"But I didn't come to play at all," said Lennie, holding his seat with dignity. "Mother sent me over on a real errand, and you started pretending."

"Is it something your mother wants to borrow?"

"No, it's something we're all going to do. Oh, something grand!"

"Oh, my! Do tell me before Mother, so I can coax her to let me!"

"Mother said I was to come over and ring the front door bell, and ask you and your mother and Mr. Balfour if you'd all come pickin' berries up on the mountain next Tuesday."

Janet began to go up and down on one foot.

"Oh, my! Oh, Lennie! Are you going? Oh, wouldn't it be grand if I could? What did you mean by keeping

something so lovely waiting such a long time? I thought maybe you'd come to borrow Mother's preserving kettle! Oh, oh, I wonder if I can go!"

She wanted Lennie to wait till she found if this good thing could really be; but Lennie was very busy and very important. He had to go to all the other houses in the village; and Janet let him out with very scant ceremony, in painful contrast to his elaborate reception; and rushed away to her mother with the news.

The greatest of all functions held in Cherry Hill society was the blackberry-picking in the late summer. Away back towards the south of the valley rose a height which was called The Mountain; the wooded hills from which Janet and Mr. Balfour had viewed the whole country on one of their May day drives. Up here was a wild rocky jungle-like region where the blackberries grew like the leaves in the forest. It was the most famous berry-patch in the County of Simcoe. People came even from Algonquin and West Hampton to garner its purple harvest; and yet its yield never became exhausted.

Once a year Cherry Hill moved out to the Mountain in a body for a whole day's picking. It was the custom for one of the leading ladies of the place to send forth a spy to look over the land and report. This year Mrs. Caldwell had sent her husband and eldest son; and like Joshua and Caleb, they had returned with glowing reports of its fruitage. They brought back their grapes of Eschol, too, a whole pailful of luscious purple berries of a size to raise excitement in the whole community.

And so Lennie was going through the village like a young herald, summoning the population to gather for the great expedition.

Janet had never been allowed to go to the berry-picking. Kirsty sometimes went and brought home a couple of pailfuls for her shelf of Stand Bys. But Mrs. Meldrum had never taken part in the annual festival, partly because she was always too busy, and partly because she felt it was not very dignified for the minister's wife to go scrambling

over logs and through underbrush in company with Mrs. Kelly, and the like, for the sake of a few berries; especially when one remembered that her father had always kept two servants.

But Janet had no traditions to live up to; and she felt that she could never sing in her heart again as long as she lived, if she could not go to the berry-picking. For Bud and Nellie and Rosie and everyone else in Cherry Hill school was going. She began at once to lay siege to her household. She attacked her mother first, and after much arguing and coaxing wrung a reluctant half promise that perhaps, if someone who was grown up and responsible and would look after her, she might be allowed to go for the afternoon only. Janet flew to Kirsty as the nearest responsible person. She found her inexorable. Kirsty would not confess it for the whole contents of the berry patch; but her increasing rheumatism made the expedition impossible.

"Tuts," she declared. "It's jist gittin' to be a sparkin' bee, this goin' off to the Mountain; a lot o' light-headed idlers gallivantin' off with empty heads and empty pails. I'm not goin', so ye can jist hold yer whisht."

Janet was too anxious to wait even to ask what a sparkin' bee was, but rushed away to Mr. Balfour. She had not forgotten the promise he had made her on the Mountain that May Day; and she now confronted him with it. There was no difficulty here; he promised at once. Of course he would take her, if he went; he wouldn't think of going without her; but he was not quite sure of going. Indeed he had not thought of it. And Janet had to be content with this. Something would surely happen that would make it possible for him to go.

She found that she had still to meet objections from her mother, all of which she parried with fluent arguments; but between the uncertainty as to whether Mr. Balfour could go and the dread lest her mother refuse her permission, she lived in a fever of suspense.

Meanwhile all the rest of Cherry Hill was getting ready.

Sylvia Ward was at the Sinclairs' on one of her frequent visits; and she announced at once that she would surely go. She had not been picking berries since she was a little girl at Grandfather's. Immediately all the young folk of the village lost their objection to picking berries and planned to go also.

Fred Gillespie and John Gibbie Gibson each promised to take a car-load of girls. Sarah Kennedy got Mrs. Murphy to keep an eye on her mother for the day. Archie McDuff closed the blacksmith shop. Peter MacKay closed the store. The farmer left the field and his wife left the kitchen. And even Kelly, Senior, left his idling for a day; and hiring a horse, he hitched it to the remains of a light wagon that had served the Kelly hens as a nesting place for years; and the whole family prepared to migrate.

And then, just the afternoon before the great day, Mr. Balfour discovered that his work was really going to allow him to get away. He and Janet would take a couple of barrels, he declared, and bring them home full.

Janet was in the midst of loud rejoicings over this news, capering up and down the veranda with Pepper, when a car stopped at the gate. It was Sam Sinclair's; and in the back seat were his two sisters and his cousin Sylvia. The three young ladies alighted; and Janet flew to the gate to meet them, shrieking her good news.

"Yes, we're coming in," said Miss Lena, in answer to Janet's pressing invitation. "Sam has to go to the mill; and we'll have a little visit with your mother till he gets back."

They all sat on the veranda, their pretty summer dresses making it look like a flower garden; and Janet sat at Miss Lena's feet, and looked up at her adoringly. Her glance sometimes showed a loving anxiety; for she could not help feeling that Miss Lena looked even sadder than usual. Perhaps her low spirits came from the grievous fact that she was not to be one of the berry-pickers. There was too much work at home for Mother, she said, when Janet protested; and someone must stay home and do it. Indeed,

Miss Sylvia seemed the only one who was very happy. She laughed and chatted, and played with Pepper, as she sat in the hammock, the sunlight through the vines playing on her pretty hat and her shining hair.

Janet was sent to the kitchen for lemonade; and Kirsty sent out the second-best glasses and the kitchen tray, when she heard that Sylvia Ward was of the party. Kirsty did not approve of Sylvia. She pronounced her too light and dressy and given to fol-de-rols.

When Janet returned with the tray Mr. Balfour was there, sitting on the steps at Miss Sylvia's feet. He had just returned from the Post Office, and had an open letter in his hand.

"There's no doubt the ministers of Algonquin have a spite at me; or they wouldn't have called me to this meeting to-morrow," he was saying.

"Don't go," advised Sylvia. "Those troublesome parsons will be foregathering all next winter, when there are no berries to pick; and you can go and have protracted meetings with them."

He smiled up at her. In Sylvia's presence it was hard to take life seriously.

"But I must," he declared, looking resolutely away. "I can get home in time to go out to the woods for supper. After all, that's the important part—isn't it, Janet? Why, Janet!" he turned to the little girl in dismay. "What about Janet?" he asked, looking towards her mother.

Janet was looking at him as if he had announced that he was going to India that very moment, never to return.

"I cannot let Janet go," declared Mrs. Meldrum, in that tone which Janet well knew was final. "I could never trust her away alone with all those children."

Janet jumped up from her seat on the steps.

"Oh, Mother," she groaned in unbelieving dismay, "you surely can't mean it."

"I would let her go if you were going, Lena," said Mrs. Meldrum, looking very worried. "But unless some grown

person were directly responsible for her, I could not think of such a thing."

Sylvia Ward looked at the despairing little face. "Poor Kiddy, we just can't leave you at home," she cried. "I'll be responsible for her, Mrs. Meldrum. I'm not going to pick many berries, you may be sure; and Janet and I will stay on the edge of the jungle until Mr. Balfour comes; and I'll hand him over the responsibility.

Janet flung herself upon her mother with entreaties which she could not resist. "I hesitate to burden you, Sylvia," Mrs. Meldrum said. "Janet is so heedless; she will need to be kept close to you all the time. But I cannot tell you how grateful I am, and I do hope," she added, turning to the little girl, "that you will be very good and not trouble Miss Sylvia. Think how kind she is to offer to take you."

Janet fairly grovelled to Sylvia in the extremity of her gratitude. She went to bed that night thinking that she was surely the most fortunate little girl in the world, and that if Mr. Balfour and Miss Lena, her mother and Molly were only going with her, life would have nothing more to ask.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE LOST SONG

THE day set for the berry-picking was a perfect mid-August day. There was a sense of peace in the warm air, and of work well done. Old Mother Earth had given her children a bountiful harvest; and now she lay smiling in the sunshine, enjoying a well-earned rest.

The long morning shadows of the mountain ash trees still stretched across the lawns; and the dew lay heavy on the golden-rod, when the berry-pickers left the village.

Those who went in buggies started while the pink dawn was beginning to kindle over the hills; and everyone said that the stars were still shining when the Kelly wagon clattered down the street and away out into the dewy country.

Janet had worn the gate almost off its hinges, when at last the Sinclair car stopped before the house and bore her away. She sat in the front seat with Sam, and teetered up and down with ecstasy at each new beauty of the road. For the summer highway was, for Janet, filled with as much interest and variety as Broadway to the devotee of the city. The golden-rod and the aster fringed the wayside; the black-eyed Susans, and the flaming fire-weed brightened the fence corners; and the stately mullen stalks, summer's golden candlesticks, lit up the path by the road.

Many of the fields were shorn smooth and brown, and their bounty packed away into barns. But here and there a harvester rode on his humming binder; and the grain swayed and writhed and fell before his advance.

The golden-winged flickers shouted and drummed in the tree-tops; the squirrels shot along the fences; the broad-winged hawk soared over the brown fields, alert, watching;

and the bright little goldfinches sailed the amber air, in their pretty waving motion, singing "Bay-bee! Bay-bee!" sweet and clear.

The Kelly wagon was half-way up the last, long, winding hill, when the Sinclair car went storming past it. They had stopped to rest the heaving, old horse where a spring bubbled out of the hillside; and all the Kelly children were paddling in the cool little stream.

Janet stood up and shouted to Bud as she whirled past. She envied the Kellys quite frankly. It must be so much more fun to walk up the hill as Bud and Rosie were doing; and to scramble up the cliff for flowers; and drink out of the crystal spring that was tumbling out among the ferns. And the Kellys looked after Janet, riding past in the car that slipped up the hill so easily, and envied her; which is the way of the world.

The big car turned off the road at the top of the hill, and ran into an open, grassy space that lay between the road and the woods. Beyond it stretched a wild tangle of underbrush and briars, stumps and fallen trees, shrubs and vines, tall trees and huge rocks, all tumbled together in glorious confusion, as though some frolicsome giant had made the place his playground.

Parties began to arrive by twos and threes. The cars and buggies were drawn up to one side; the horses were unhitched; pails and cups rattled merrily; and the wilderness rang with gay voices.

Before entering the green tangle of underbrush, the children were all warned solemnly not to stray away. The "Patch" covered many acres, and below the hill it merged into a great swamp that stretched on and on, some said, as far as the Georgian Bay. It was a place where it would be easy to lose oneself; and the Kellys were admonished by their mother not to dare to get out of her sight, or she'd go home and leave them to be lost forever.

A tall blackened stump was chosen as the centre of the camp; and Tim Kelly swarmed up it; and tied his mother's old shawl around it. It was bright red; and made a stand-

ard which everyone was warned to note; and from which all were to get their bearings.

At first there was no need for any landmarks; for the berries were plentiful at the edge of the patch; and during the forenoon no one went far beyond the green glade where the camp was established.

The young people gathered about Sylvia Ward; and just as naturally, the children collected around Janet. All her especial friends were there; Nellie and Kitty, and Susie Beckett, Lennie and Bud, and all the rest of the Kellys, except Molly. Janet was sure this was the most glorious time she had ever experienced; and if it were not for the hampering fact that she had to keep an eye on Miss Sylvia, and that Miss Sylvia had to keep an eye on her, she would surely have gone wild with delight.

The youngsters picked a few berries; but they were too busy to devote much time to this rather dull sport. Playing hide-and-seek was the favourite pastime. The berry patch seemed constructed for that very purpose; for your companion might be right under the pail into which you were putting your berries, and you would know nothing about it. And it was glorious fun hiding and jumping out suddenly to scare everybody.

The Kelly boys had a great deal of fun with Lennie. Poor Lennie had been warned so thoroughly by his mother and sisters against getting lost that he was afraid to step into the underbrush, for fear he might never emerge. He and Janet were alone for a few minutes in a little green nook, and while Lennie was talking, she dropped silently behind a log. He turned to her for an answer, and found himself alone. "Janet!" he screamed sharply. "Where are you?" And when Janet leaped out at him, he screamed louder than ever.

"Oh, Janet!" he cried with a shiver, "you're awful! I don't know which scares me most, to lose you, or to find you!"

He lost and found so many of his mischievous companions in the same manner so often that he was ready to die of

nervousness. And at last Janet took pity on him, and managed to turn the tide of popular interest toward swinging by the limbs of the trees from rock to rock, monkey fashion.

In spite of the fact that everyone had been eating berries all forenoon, they were all ravenous for dinner. Kelly senior erected a tripod and slung upon it a huge cauldron that had been brought from Gibbie Gibson's sugar camp. It was soon boiling and giving out the fragrance of hot coffee. Mrs. Beckett and Mrs. Caldwell put away their berry pails in a shady nook, and spread long white tablecloths upon the grass. Everyone brought out her basket; and soon there was such an array of salads, and cold chicken, and pink slices of ham, and ripe tomatoes, and muskmelons, and watermelons, and bread and biscuits, and cake, and pie, as made all the young Kellys groan aloud over their limited capacity.

Just as they had seated themselves upon the grass in long rows before the table-cloth, and Mrs. Beckett had begun to pour the coffee, there came a great honking and roaring from the road. A cloud of dust arose on the hill-top, and a long grey car came whirling out of it and drew up on the grass. Janet uttered a little squeal of delight, and all the little Kellys jumped up from the table and yelled. For there on the front seat of the handsome car, sitting up like the greatest lady in the land, was Molly; and by her side the big, stout man Janet remembered having seen when he brought Miss Sylvia to the Castle.

He got out of the car and came right over to the table, and asked if they would take a couple of tramps for dinner. And Miss Sylvia laughed and flushed prettily, as she made a place for him between her and Marjorie Gillespie.

Molly squeezed in between Janet and Bud, and taking the baby on her lap, explained the miracle of her coming. It was all that lovely Mr. Hilton's doings, and Lena's. Molly was quite one of the Sinclair family now, and called them all by their first names. She could not come to the berry-picking in the morning, because she had to help do

Sylvia's washing. And she and Lena were just finishing it, when along came Mr. Hilton in his car; and he was so disappointed when he found that Sylvia was gone that he begged Lena to come with him and show him the way to the berry-patch. But she could not come because there was so much to do, so she sent Molly instead. And Mr. Hilton was the very kindest gentleman in the world. He gave her a big box of candy. She had left it in the car under her coat; but Buddy could get it when dinner was over. And they had had the loveliest drive on the way out; and he had promised to take her and Rosie to Algonquin some day, and take them to see the picture show! And she had brought a pail, and Lena said she was to pick berries for Ma; and Ma was to sit in the shade with Corny and not do a thing all day. Ma smiled her toothless smile upon her girl, and said it was the darling that Lena Sinclair was to be sure. They all went back to the berry-picking, when the dinner was over, Molly the centre of the children's group, and the wild stretches of the jungle rang with their voices, and everyone was happier than ever.

That is, everyone except Sylvia Ward. She had suddenly grown quiet; and whenever there came the sound of a car from the hidden road, she listened anxiously and looked worried. Indeed, Janet felt that Miss Sylvia did not seem to be having such a good time as she had had in the morning; and she was sure that Mr. Hilton did not like picking berries at all. And then Fred Gillespie and John Gibbie, and Willie Gibson's Willie went off and left her, and picked berries with Marjorie Gillespie and the Beckett girls. True to her pledge, Janet kept close to her guardian; and for some time the children kept near Janet, laughing and calling to each other over the bushes, and playing hide-and-seek. But she soon began to find her position a difficult one. It was not because Janet felt herself a third party, but because there was not a fourth party and a fifth. Janet loved the crowd; and she began to feel it slipping away from her. It was impossible to keep anyone in sight long, where the bushes grew high above your head. And Mr.

Hilton seemed to be always straying away, and leading Miss Sylvia and her with him.

They wandered some distance from the edge of the woods; and Janet soon found that she had lost all her little companions. Mr. Hilton and Miss Sylvia sat down on a mossy log; and Janet listlessly ate a few berries, and listened to the joyous shrieks growing more distant, and unhappy prisoner, chained by a sense of duty to a pair of unwilling balls.

Mr. Hilton wiped the perspiration from his face, and said this was the dickens of a place to bring a fellow. And Miss Sylvia laughed, and said the fellow should have left himself at home.

"Don't you want to go for a spin in the car? We'll come back in a few minutes," he said suddenly. "And little Grey Eyes can stay with the others." Miss Sylvia demurred; she oughtn't to leave the others. Beside, she had promised to look after Janet; and she just adored picking berries, anyway.

There was some low talk after that, which Janet did not hear; but at last Miss Sylvia arose from the log.

"Janet, dear, would you stay with Marjorie and Nellie or someone else, while I go for a little ride?" she asked.

Janet made no attempt to hide her joy. If they were waiting for her permission, she felt, she would have advised them to go riding in the car all day.

"Oh, won't that be lovely," she cried, with unflattering honesty. "May I stay with Bud? He's just over there behind that sumach."

"Yes, dear, stay wherever you like," said Miss Sylvia easily, "only don't wander away, will you? You'd better go to Molly."

Janet promised, as she would have promised anything in her excess of gratitude.

"Well, run along, then," said Miss Sylvia, laughing at her eagerness, "and let me see you anchored before I start."

"Here, take this box of candy, kiddy," said Mr. Hilton,

"and divide it up among the kids." Janet took it, feeling that Molly's opinion of the kind gentleman was her own. And, with the box in one hand 'and her little tin pail in the other, she scrambled over the big log and disappeared behind some bushes.

"Hoo, hoo, Molly!" she called joyfully, "I'm coming!" A faint shout answered her.

"Molly's just over there, Miss Sylvia," Janet called back. And Miss Sylvia's lovely musical voice answered, "All right; bye, bye!" And she and the owner of the car scrambled away towards the open glade.

But neither Bud nor Molly was on the other side of the sumach clump. The pink sun-bonnet that had deceived Janet belonged to Minnie MacKay, who was picking berries with her mother. "Where's Molly?" cried Janet, coming up to them. "I thought you were her, Minnie."

"She was here a min'it ago; she's just gone over there to tim her pail into her Ma's," said Minnie with a nod in a vague direction. "I'm racin' Susie Beckett," she mumbled, as an excuse for her brevity.

This was a fine idea, Janet thought. She would find Bud and race with him. But there was no sign of a Kelly anywhere, so she raised her voice.

"Ho, Bu-ud! Where are you?"

"Here!" cried Bud's little piping voice, apparently just on the other side of a clump of trees.

"Have you got many?" called Janet.

"No, haven't any! I've just been and timmed mine into Ma's pail!"

"Mine's empty, too!" shouted Janet. "I'll race you!" And with that she leaped over a fallen log and attacked a berry bush furiously. It was a wonderful bush; it seemed that there were gallons of berries hanging on it. Janet fairly rained the little purple spheres into her pail.

Suddenly Bud's thin voice rose again, this time farther away.

"Have you found a good patch, Jinny?"

Janet giggled softly and crouched down until the big

branches were arched over her head. She knew that trick by this time—to let someone find a splendid bush and then come and take the berries all away!

Bud's voice grew fainter; and she resumed her work in laughing silence. But the big bush did not fill the pail after all; instead, as she crawled out from under it, it unkindly caught hold of her braid, and held her fast. It took a long time and a good many painful pulls to free herself; but she was encouraged by immediately spying an abundant harvest a few yards away.

She heard voices, calling, calling on every side; and the scrambling, tearing sound that told there were people moving near. She went on happily, from bush to bush, determined not to disclose her whereabouts to Bud, until she had filled her pail. The process took much longer than she had thought. She found the box of candy hampered her; so she placed it upon a stump and redoubled her efforts. The abundant harvest did not repeat itself for some time; she seemed to have come to a place where there were no berries; and she moved on faster in search of another generous bush. She had gone far into the green tangle; the voices of the other pickers had grown indistinct; the green stillness was very lovely. She was hearing birds she had never heard before. She wished she had let Bud find her, so he would tell her their names. Sweet, new voices they were, ringing softly through the green and golden silence.

She wandered happily on; and at last another bush, hung thickly with purple jewels, rewarded her search. It filled the little pail, heaping it up, until she found it necessary to eat the big luscious berry that toppled off the conical pile.

"Hi, Bud!" she shouted triumphantly, "I beat you!"

There was no answer from Bud, and Janet giggled. His pail wasn't full, and, of course, he wouldn't answer. So, holding her burden carefully, she started back. And then, for the first time, a question came, where was "back"?

Where was Bud? And where was the stump where she had left the box of candy?

Oh, yes, there it was, away over there, beyond that lovely bed of touch-me-not. She saw the gleam of the white paper cover. She stumbled towards it; but it seemed much farther away than she had thought; the tangle of briars and shrubs seemed to grow worse. She reached it at last; and was astonished to find that the white object was not the box of candy, but a beautiful big fungus growth on the side of a rotten stump. Janet stood admiring it for some time. It was a lovely thing: polished and lacquered, brown wood on the upper side; and on the lower, exquisite, pure white velvet. She determined she would bring Bud here; and they would take it home for their play house in the orchard.

She looked about her again for the stump that held the candy box. Oh, now she remembered. It was just on the other side of that cedar clump, of course. She went leaping and scrambling towards it, and was a little surprised to find that she had to pass a huge rock to get to it. She did not remember that there was a rock so big in all the berry patch. She clambered hurriedly around it, a little anxious lest Bud have his pail full before she returned. But the other side of the rock and the cedar clump both failed to reveal the white box. Perhaps Bud or Lennie had been watching her; and had come and taken it away for a joke. Janet grew indignant at the very thought. She climbed upon a big log and looked about her; the view showed her the familiar little sumach grove where Mrs. Kelly had been left sitting with Corny, and the filled pails. She leaped down joyfully; and tore her way towards it through the tangle, getting her hair caught again and again, and spilling some of her precious berries. She reached the sumachs at last and stopped, completely puzzled. There were no pails there, and no baby, and no Mrs. Kelly! Janet was just a little disconcerted; she did not dream how far she had wandered from her friends; but she suddenly remembered her mother's warnings and the stories Lennie had told her of the terrors of the woods.

But she was not frightened yet; she had a comfortable feeling that her friends were all around her. She would not have been the least surprised if Bud had leaped from behind the bush right beside her, as he had been doing all morning. Indeed, she had a suspicion that he was watching her right now from behind a stone or stump, to see if she would get scared when she was left alone like Lennie. Just to be sure she called:

"Ah, ha, Mr. Bud! I know you're there; you needn't try to hide!" But a loud scornful caw, from a huge old crow, away up on the top of a tall, blackened stump was the only answer.

It reminded Janet suddenly of the stump with Mrs. Kelly's shawl hanging from it like a red banner; and she climbed upon a mossy stone and looked around for it. But the trees here were so tall, and their branches so thick and intertwined that she could see only a few yards ahead, and a small round patch of blue sky above. The sunshine was pouring through the branches; the little birds were singing; and there seemed nothing to be alarmed about; but Janet began to feel anxious. Everything familiar seemed to have left her. She noticed with a throb of her heart that she did not hear the sound of voices any more. She called sharply, "Bud!" and louder, "Molly!" "Nellie!" | But there was no answer.

She hurried on; each new stump seeming to be the one where she had left the box, each new clump of cedar the one where she would surely find Bud. She stopped at last really frightened and called at the top of her voice, and then stood listening. The unanswering silence brought a terrible sense of desolation. There was not a sign nor sound of humanity anywhere. Janet looked around her, and was suddenly seized with panic. She was lost! She realised it in one overwhelming moment. It seemed as if all her friends must have gone back to Cherry Hill and left her in this dreadful place, so long did it seem since she had seen anyone. For a moment she stood, breathless with dread; and then she gave a long loud call for help.

"Molly!" she screamed. "Bud! Miss Sylvia!"

And then, oh, blessed sound, she heard a faint halloo. She thought it came from the direction in which she had been going; and she shouted an answer and plunged forward. She stopped and called again, but only the dread silence and the loud thumping of her own heart answered. The tears came streaming down her face so that she could not see her way; but she stumbled blindly forward. The little pail of berries slipped from her grasp and went hurtling down a steep rock. She took no heed, but ran on and on, crying and calling, and ever getting deeper and deeper into the woods.

CHAPTER XXIV

A SONGLESS NIGHT

HUGH BALFOUR hurried home from town, hoping to reach the berry-patch in time for tea. He had been deeply disappointed at the loss of this long summer day in the woods with Sylvia; and his disappointment was not lessened by meeting, on his way to town, a long grey car, speeding along the road to Cherry Hill.

The slanting rays of the sun were stretching from hill top to hill top, and the valleys were growing purple in the shadows, when he turned his little car, smoking from the long climb, into the green glade on the edge of the berry patch. The long white tablecloths had been spread on the grass again and supper was almost ready.

Sam Sinclair, mounted on a stump, was beating a loud tattoo on the bottom of a tin pail with an iron spoon; and at the welcome summons the tired berry-pickers were coming out of the jungle, tearing their way through the briars, brown and scratched and happy, each bearing his purple harvest. There was a great babel of laughing voices, a clatter of plates and cups, and over all the delightful odor of burning cedar and frying bacon. The young minister was hailed joyfully from all sides.

"Ye're jist in time, Mr. Balfour," shouted Mrs. Beckett, from the flat-topped stump, where she was cutting huge slices of snowy bread, and Sarah Kennedy was spreading them with golden butter.

Over in a little hollow, where the cauldron hung above the fire, Fred Gillespie and Sylvia Ward were quarreling merrily over the placing of the frying pan. She had donned a crimson knitted jacket, for the evening was growing cool;

and she looked like a lovely fair-haired gipsy in the light of the dancing flames. She greeted the young minister radiantly, as he approached the fire.

"Here you are at last!" she cried, and then added in a lower tone, "How too bad that you should have missed so much of this glorious day!"

His hand trembled a little as he adjusted the pan for her over the flames. Her words were light; but her voice held a new note that set his heart beating faster.

"I'm afraid the day didn't miss me, though," he answered boldly, "I met a car this morning, breaking all the Ontario speed limits, and looking as if it were heading straight for a berry-patch."

She looked around with an exaggerated air of interest. "How disappointing! It's not here. I'm afraid it must have had that fatal blowout that's been threatening it for so long."

She looked at him with dancing eyes, expecting him to catch eagerly at her meaning. She did not intend to tell him just yet, though. She would not let him know for a while that she had that day dismissed the grey car forever. She must have some concessions from him first. But when he asked her to ride home with him, which he certainly would do, then, she might——

But before he could reply a noisy crowd of youngsters came tumbling out of the berry-patch. His eyes lit up.

"Where's Janet?" he asked suddenly.

"Janet? Oh, dear, I forgot all about her. She hasn't been with me for quite a while. I handed her over to the Kellys; and I've no doubt they're all up a tree by this time."

She was a little disconcerted by the look of pained surprise that passed over his face. She was hurt, too, that he should have shown so little attention to what she had been saying. She had given up a great deal for him that day; and she felt he ought to have sensed it. But instead of looking at her, he called to Nellie, who was racing past, her arms full of flowers.

"Oh, Mr. Balfour," she cried running up to him, "look at all the lovely touch-me-nots Rosie and I got! Look at them jump!" She screamed with laughter, as she touched a little green pod and saw it fly to pieces.

"They're very pretty; where's Janet, Nellie?"

"I don't know. I'm just looking for her. Didn't she go with you, Sylvia, in the car?"

"In the car?" Hugh Balfour turned enquiringly to the pretty gipsy. There was no smile on his face now.

"No, Janet wasn't with me," she said rather shortly. "Molly had charge of her for most of the afternoon."

Just then Molly came out from the green shadows of the trees, her bent little figure staggering under a heavy load of berries, and surrounded by small Kellys, all turned a deep purple.

"Is Janet with you, Molly?" asked the young minister. Molly looked about her.

"No, Mr. Balfour, Janet hasn't been with me all afternoon." Sylvia gave an exclamation, half startled, half annoyed.

"Why, Molly! Janet went to you early in the afternoon, when I went for a little ride," she declared sharply.

Molly shook her head wondering. "No, she didn't. I haven't seen Janet for ever so long. We were all calling her. Was she with you, Bud?"

No, Bud hadn't seen her either for a long time. He wanted her to pick with him and Tim, but she said she couldn't leave Sylvia.

"Maybe she's with Lennie," cried Nellie, looking over towards the table spread on the grass.

Mr. Balfour turned and walked over towards Mrs. Caldwell. The little cloud that had threatened so often to obscure his happiness, but which he had persistently refused to recognise, was spreading rapidly over his bright sky.

"Well, well, Mr. Balfour," called Mrs. Caldwell heartily. "We were just saying we wished you would come. Supper is nearly ready."

"Is Janet with you, Mrs. Caldwell?" he asked, looking

around. Mrs. Caldwell looked down at Lennie for answer. He was sitting beside the tablecloth, waiting miserably, in a state of semi-starvation, for the supper to start.

"Janet went away with Sylvia Ward," Lennie volunteered aggrievedly. "That gentleman that came at dinner time with the big car took them for a ride; and Janet wasn't with us at all. It wasn't fair for them to quit picking and go off riding like that; do you think it was, Mr. Balfour?"

But Mr. Balfour did not answer. A sense of uneasiness was possessing him. All Janet's little companions were accounted for; but where was Janet? He walked across the green, taking an inventory of all the berry-pickers. As he came near the fire again, Sylvia, the centre of a laughing group, was stirring a pail of tea with a long stick and singing,

"Double, double, toil and trouble,
Fire burn and cauldron bubble."

He heard a quick light footfall behind him; and turned in swift relief, expecting Janet to throw herself upon him. But it was little Bud Kelly. He looked up at the tall man, his eyes big with apprehension.

"Mr. Balfour," he whispered, "where's Janet? I've hunted, and hunted, and called, and called; and I can't find her anywhere!"

"She's probably back among the trees with someone who hasn't come out yet," he answered with a sudden sinking of his heart. "Come with me, and we'll look for her."

John Gibbie came away from the fire and joined them. "You don't think it's possible," the young man began.

"No; there's no need for alarm yet. But I must see if everyone is here."

Hugh Balfour jumped upon a stump that stood near; and silenced everyone with a great halloo.

"Friends!" he shouted, "we want to be sure that none of our party is missing. I haven't seen little Janet Meldrum yet. Does anyone here know where she is?"

There was a sudden silence; the stillness that falls when the first chill of fear creeps over a merry crowd. The young minister ran his eye over them as they gathered round him. "Mrs. Kelly?" he called. Yes, her childer were all here, she responded tremulously. The Becketts, the Caldwells, the MacKays, the McDuffs, all the Gibsons,—no one was missing. But no one, when called upon, could tell where Janet was.

When the last person had passed in review, Hugh Balfour turned to the woods, now lying silent in the golden evening light; he put his fingers between his teeth and gave the shrill, piercing whistle, which Janet would recognise. Everybody listened breathlessly; there was no answer from the green stillness. Then he called, "Janet! Janet!" and only the crows, winging their way across the wilderness towards their home, answered.

He leaped down off the stump; and, with a couple of strides, he was in front of Sylvia Ward. His face was pale; and his eyes were not pleasant for the careless young woman to look into; but his voice was calm.

"Miss Ward, will you please tell me just when you saw Janet last?" he said.

"I—I don't remember," she faltered for a moment; but Sylvia was only a spoilt child, and could not brook a hint of blame. She went on with something of defiance in her tone, "Shortly after dinner Mr. Hilton and I went away for a little ride in the car—about three o'clock, I should think. I left Janet in Molly's charge. Molly must know where she went."

Molly stepped forward, trembling and tearful. "The last I saw of her was when they was playing hide-and-go-seek, right after dinner," she faltered, "and she was with Bud and Lennie. Oh, Sylvia, you never told me I was to watch Janet!"

"I sent her to Molly when I left, and she called back," Sylvia looked up at the man for whom she had that day made what she considered the greatest sacrifice of her life; and the expression of his eyes froze the paltry ex-

cuses on her lips. "I'm very sorry," she faltered. But before she could finish he had turned his back upon her and was striding towards the woods, Bud running at his side, and all the young men following.

"Let us all take a run in and back, for about ten minutes," he cried, "don't go far. If she has really wandered away, we must organise a thorough search. But she may have fallen asleep somewhere. Just walk around the edge of the woods and call. No, Bud, my man, you stay out here; we may need you later."

They plunged into the underbrush, shouting the little girl's name; while, their supper all forgotten, the berry-pickers crowded together and waited in silence broken only by Molly's sobs.

The searchers returned with grave faces. Fred Gillespie carried an unopened box of candy.

"That was Janet's," said Sylvia, shaken out of her self-interest. "Mr. Hilton gave it to her just as we left."

Hugh Balfour took it. There were marks of little berry-stained fingers on it. The sight gave his heart a wrench. But there was no time to waste. He jumped upon a stone and gave his orders sharp and quick.

"Janet may not be very far away," he cried, "but we must lose no time in starting after her. Fred, you take your car and run down to the village. Bring every lantern in the place, and bring all the men, too, we may need everybody. And Mrs. Caldwell and Mrs. Beckett, will you go with Fred and stay with Mrs. Meldrum; we may be back with Janet before she is unduly alarmed. And bring every bit of firearms you can collect, too, Fred, and hurry. Mr. Kelly, you keep up a big fire. Here, you boys can gather wood for him!"

"Sam, you had better take as many as you can of these ladies and the little ones home, when they've had their supper; there's no use keeping them here; and we may be up all night." He ran to Fred Gillespie, as the young man leaped into his car. "I'm going a little way into the woods

now, Fred," he cried. "I'll try to be back before you return; and drive like the wind, that's a good fellow."

He turned and disappeared once more into the woods, several of the young men following him. He did not look at Sylvia Ward, as he passed her standing shivering over the fire.

The little boys dashed away for wood; and soon a great fire was leaping and crackling and sending out great shafts of light into the darkening woods, now ringing with the sound of Janet's name.

Just as the darkness had become complete, the searchers came back, scratched and torn and breathless and unsuccessful. At the same moment a procession of cars came roaring up the hill, bearing every able-bodied man from the village, and many from the surrounding country. Not one of the berry-pickers had left, except those who had gone on an errand of mercy to Mrs. Meldrum; and they had all returned, bringing her with them.

Janet's mother sat quietly on the ground, white-faced but composed; and held poor weeping Molly's head in her lap; and little Bud flung himself upon the ground in a corner away from everyone, and sobbed out his breaking heart, refusing to be comforted.

For the first time in his life Kelly Senior found himself the most important man in the community. He had lived most of his life in the woods, and knew it better than he knew the one street of Cherry Hill. While the women hurriedly handed out some supper to the men who had not yet taken time to eat anything, he organised the search parties, giving full instructions to each.

In a few minutes the searchers were ready and had plunged into the woods. In an incredibly short time the sound of their voices and the wavering sight of their lanterns had disappeared, and left only darkness and silence and a great dread over those who could do nothing but wait.

And all through that night of waiting Sylvia Ward sat beside Janet's mother, silent and sick at heart. She had

never before faced a hard situation in all her happy self-centred life. She had often boasted gayly that she never would. But now a dread calamity stared her in the face: a situation brought about by her lifelong habit of choosing always the easy, pleasant road. And to-night the easy way was not hers to choose.

It was midnight when Hugh Balfour and his companion, young John Gibbie, found themselves coming down off the dry, stony highlands to the edge of the deep swamp. Fear was gripping the young minister's heart. He dared not let his bitter thoughts go forward to dwell on little Janet, wandering alone in the wilderness, nor backward to the waiting mother, nor the young woman whose selfish carelessness might be the cause of an overwhelming calamity. He had plunged forward in silence all the night; while his young companion followed, finding it difficult to keep up with him.

There had been just one bright spot in the darkness of their journey. It was a little tin pail, lying overturned at the foot of a big rock, with black-berries scattered about it; and in the soft leaf-mould the track of little feet. Since they had found them they had stumbled on faster than ever; but they had come to the soft mud of the swamp now, and they would have to move slowly and carefully.

Hugh Balfour leaped upon a log, flashing his light far around over the wild beauty of tangled vine, and undergrowth, and fallen trees; and then he suddenly gave a great shout, and John Gibbie sprang to his side. "Tracks!" he yelled, hoarsely. There were Janet's little foot marks again!

He sprang forward from log to log, shouting, "Janet, Ho! Ho! Janet!" And Janet, only a few rods away down the dark choked aisle of the forest, heard the voice ringing through her troubled dream. She had been stopped in her terrified flight by her long braid of hair. It had caught, this time hopelessly, in a clump of briars, just as she was scrambling over a fallen log. All her frantic efforts to free herself had been in vain; and at last, in despair and

utter exhaustion, she had fallen into a troubled doze, her throbbing head half-supported by the roots of the tree. And there she lay, a prisoner; held back from plunging into the swamp by that which had been the chief trouble of her happy, riotous life.

In her half waking, half unconscious condition she heard a voice, calling, calling, far, far away. She tried to answer its insistent command; tried to rise up and obey, sobbing because she could not. And then, a dazzling light seemed to blaze around her; and the voice seemed to be shouting in her ears, "Janet! Janet!"

And then Janet knew what it was, and sprang up with a scream of wild joy, to fall back again held by her hair.

"Mr. Balfour!" She was almost too hoarse to make a sound. "Oh, Mr. Balfour!"

And the next moment he had leaped to the log, dropping his lantern; and had caught the little shivering figure in his arms. Janet clutched him convulsively round the neck; and hung on, with a strangling grasp, trying to make herself believe that he was really there, while she sobbed wildly over and over:

"Oh, I thought you'd never come! I thought God would never send you!"

And John Gibbie picked up the fallen lantern; and, fumbling clumsily with his rifle, because his eyes were stinging sharply, he pointed it into the patch of pale sky straight overhead, where one clear star shone serenely, and fired two rapid shots.

And then, far away, to the right and left, and behind, the black stillness was broken by faint cracking reports, the joyful tidings passed along that the lost had been found.

CHAPTER XXV

NEW MUSIC

JANET skipped down the hall towards the study in an undulating motion, just as the goldfinches danced over the sunny fields behind her home. For the first time in her life she had been looking carefully at her reflection in the mirror. She had found the picture perfectly satisfactory; and was off in pride and haste to display herself to Mr. Balfour.

Greatly to her relief the flag was out; she tapped hurriedly. In response to his "Come in" she flung wide the door and stood on the threshold, a little pink gingham statue, motionless, except for her dancing eyes.

"Hello, Jenny Melody," he began, "where——" he stopped; he stared. Then he jumped from his seat, and fairly shouted.

"What in the world? Oh, I say! Oh, *Johnny* Melody! Whose little boy is this?"

He dropped into his seat again, and laughed and laughed; while Janet hopped all over the study, laughing and screaming in mad delight.

"Turn round till I see how it looks behind," he cried, when he had recovered a little.

Janet spun round on her toes like a top, until her short locks, cut trimly just above her ears, stood out all round her head like a halo gone mad.

"Oh, Mr. Balfour!" she gasped, staggering against the desk, dizzy and out of breath. "Isn't it the loveliest, beautifullest thing you ever saw?"

"It certainly is," he declared emphatically, regarding her with shining eyes.

"But what does your mother say?"

Janet tried hard to look distressed, with absolutely no success. She drew down the corners of her mouth; but her eyes sparkled, and her one dimple became very conspicuous.

"Poor mother doesn't like it at all; and she says she's afraid Daddy will be disappointed. But she says when she thinks how glad she is that I wasn't lost altogether, she can stand losing my hair. And, anyway, the burrs just *wouldn't* come out. Kirsty doesn't like it, either. She says it's wicked; and there's some place in the Bible where it says it's a shame for a woman to have her hair cut off. But old Mrs. Gibbie Gibson hasn't any hair at all; and she's awfully good; and she hasn't missed church once in twenty-five years. But I don't mind as long as you like it, Mr. Balfour; I just knew you would. Oh, I can't tell you how lovely I feel. I haven't got that dreadful *tidy* feeling I always used to have."

She stopped for lack of breath; and smoothed down her bobbed curls, her face radiant.

"Well, well! Now that you've got your hair off, and that you're learning to sing, you'll soon have nothing in the world to wish for."

"I won't really, when Daddy gets home next week. No; just one thing. But I don't think I'll ask God for it, though," she added growing suddenly grave. "Even when I want anything very, very bad, I don't believe I'll ever coax mother for it, or ever pray for it again."

"Why?" he asked, very much interested.

"Because," her voice grew hushed, "I think God must have such a bad time getting people like me what they want. You know, I prayed and prayed that God would let me have my hair cut off; and He did. But just think of all the trouble He had to go to! I had to get lost, and get my hair so full of burrs and things that it couldn't ever be combed again. And it made poor mother sick in bed; and made Kirsty walk all the way to the mountain in the night. And it made you lame trying to find me. And it

scared everybody in all the country round; and kept them up all night. And so I'll be afraid to want anything very bad again."

Hugh Balfour looked at her very thoughtfully. Her childish reasoning was revealing to him his own soul. He, too, had wanted something very badly; and had well nigh spoiled his own life in his determination to get it.

"There's just one more thing I want dreadfully bad," Janet was chattering away, "but I don't like to ask God for it. I'm afraid to."

She balanced herself on her favourite perch, the arm of her father's old chair.

"Is it something you could tell me?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. It's you, yourself! I don't want you to go away from here when Daddy comes home. I don't want you to go away ever, ever. And when I think about you going away to India or China it gives me that awful feeling in my stomach that I had when I knew I was lost."

He smiled. "But you wouldn't have me stay home when you know how badly I'm needed in India. Don't you remember what you learned in Mission Band about the little widows of India, little girls not as old as you!"

"Oh, yes. I know," said Janet, heaving one of her long windy sighs, "that's why I won't ask God to let you stay home. I'm afraid He might; and I'd be sorry all the time about the little girls in India. But," her voice trembled a little, "don't you think that, perhaps, the Lord would like you to be the preacher in West Hampton?"

He started. "What do you know about West Hampton, you funny little Jenny Melody?" he asked, trying to treat the heavy matter playfully.

"Oh, I heard what Mrs. Wallace and the other delicate said when they were here. And Mrs. Caldwell and Mrs. Beckett were talking about you going there instead of being a missionary; but I promised not to tell that!" she added hastily.

His eyes dropped to his work on the desk before him. He had suspected that the women of the church discussed

his plans; but the assurance of it filled him with resentment.

"I'm sure none of them know what they're talking about, Janet," he said. "I haven't taken anyone into my confidence. But I'm not going to West Hampton; that's settled."

Janet sighed heavily, "Oh, my, then you'll go away far; and I'll never see you again!"

"Oh, yes, you will; you're coming out to India to be a missionary, too, remember."

"But are you going to India right away, as soon as you're through college?"

"I'm not sure. There's likely to be a very big war, Janet, and perhaps I may be needed as a real soldier."

"That would be worse," mourned Janet, "'cause I couldn't go to war with you."

She paused, and looked at him steadily, in the way that told him she had something on her mind which she must speedily get off. He was quite at sea as to what it might be, when she started to unload it.

"Mr. Balfour," she began hesitatingly, "do people that are engaged always have to get married?"

"They don't have to," he informed her, wondering what on earth her busy mind had got hold of this time, "but they generally do."

"Why don't they, sometimes?"

"Well, sometimes one person may die; or they may find they have made a mistake, and agree to part. But why are you troubling your foolish little bob-tailed head over such things? You ought to be thinking about dolls or fairies or nice, little, woolly baa-lambs."

"That's what I was thinking about,—the lambs. It was when the lambs danced in the evening, that Miss Sylvia talked about it."

"About what?" he asked in nervous dread.

"About being engaged; Miss Sylvia and Bessie Sinclair told me that day you came for me down to the castle."

And then, drawing upon her infallible memory, Janet

produced enough of that evening's conversation, coupled with the information she had gleaned from Mrs. Caldwell and Mrs. Beckett and Nellie, to show the young man that if he wouldn't go away to be a missionary, but would preach in the beautiful big church in West Hampton, that Miss Sylvia would end her engagement to the man with the big car, and they would all be happy together forever.

It all came out in a rush, before the astonished young man could stop her.

"Wait, wait, Janet!" he cried in dismay. "It isn't quite right for you to tell me all this, dear. I——"

"Oh, yes, they wouldn't mind," answered Janet easily. "Miss Sylvia said that thing about 'Little pitchers,' you know, that thing they always say when they know I'm listening; so I know it's all right. And after I heard that, I thought how lovely it would be if you'd marry Miss Sylvia, and go to live in West Hampton; and I'd go and visit you every week. And Martha Beckett told Marjorie Gillespie; and Nellie heard them, that Miss Sylvia had been sick in bed ever since I was lost, 'cause you wouldn't go——"

Her mother's voice calling her in a high excited tone brought a merciful interruption. There was a sound of hurrying feet and excited voices downstairs. Janet jumped off her perch.

"Oh, my!" she cried, "it's so lovely not to feel that long tail hitting my back every time I jump. Oh, Mr. Balfour," she continued moving reluctantly towards the door, "I do believe I'll be able to sing out loud ever so much better without my hair! It was always getting into my ears; and I just know it kept me from hearing properly. Yes, mother, dear!" as her mother's voice called her again; and away she went bounding down the stairs.

Hugh Balfour hurriedly removed the flag and closed the door. He drew a breath of relief at being alone. He wanted to think. He had long known that Sylvia had no sympathy with his desire to be a missionary. Her self-centred life was too narrow to admit the glory of a vision of service. But he had not known that she was actually

engaged to the owner of the grey car, nor that she was willing to give him up for the poor country minister.

But the last knowledge, which, some weeks earlier, would have brought him joy, even though it was mingled with self-accusation, now found him cold and unresponsive. That night of terror in the woods, when he had faced the consequence of Sylvia's selfishness, had burned something out of his heart. Like Janet his ear was waking to the true music of life. He was hearing again its clear thrilling note, the call of his great task. A whole world of lost children, little Janets, wandering alone in the darkness, were calling him to come to their aid, their sobbing, childish voices saying over and over, "I thought you would never come! I thought God would never send you!"

The shattering of his pretty castle of romance had left no bitterness; but it had left a deep regret. If she had only been all she might have been, he often said to himself. His dream Sylvia had been "Holy, wise and fair," like the Sylvia of the old song. It was hard to find that the saints had given no inner graces to the real Sylvia.

So absorbed was he with his thoughts that he did not notice that the stir in the house had been growing, till the sound of hurrying feet and voices in the hall aroused him. A heavy hand knocked thunderously upon the door. It flung open, and a stout, bronzed man, with a wild-eyed Janet hanging to one arm, and her laughing, weeping mother to the other, filled up the doorway.

"Hi, young man!" cried the Rev. John Meldrum, "come out of that! This is my study!"

Hugh Balfour met the outstretched hand with a leap; and was swept into the rapturous joy of the unexpected homecoming. But as he watched Janet's frantic demonstrations, he was conscious of a strange cold feeling at his heart. He realised that he had been merely a substitute to her, as well as to the congregation, through this long, happy year. Henceforth he must take second place.

CHAPTER XXVI

A CLEARER CAROL

JANET was enduring the first day of the Christmas holidays when Mr. Balfour returned to Cherry Hill. He had gone back to the city for his last year in college; but had suddenly decided upon a new course of study. A new call had come to him as it was coming to many another valiant young Canadian heart, an insistent call to do a great and terrible task. And so when he came back to the little village, he wore the badge of his new service, a chaplain's uniform. When he stood up in the pulpit beside her father the next Sunday, tall and slim, and very young looking in his smart khaki, Janet was sure there never was such a grand looking soldier went to war in the world before.

Everyone in Knox Church congregation rather inclined to her opinion; and everyone was at church to hear his farewell sermon. Even old Watty Sinclair was there, all the way from "Down Below"; and with him his nephew Tom, and Tom's Woman.

There was one notable exception. For the first time in a dozen years, Kirsty's place in the Manse pew was empty. She could not abide, she declared, to sit under a minister dressed in the unclerical garb in which Mr. Balfour had arrayed himself. It was not fitting that any man should preach the Word to Christian people in sic like trimmin's and trappin's; his leggings and his spurs were clean scandalous in the pulpit; and he didn't even have on a white collar.

It was in vain that Mrs. Meldrum explained that Mr. Balfour was wearing the regulation chaplain's uniform, pre-

scribed by his country. Kirsty would have none of it even if it had been commanded by the King. Nevertheless, she prepared such a dinner on Saturday night as left no doubt in the family's mind that, whatever she thought of his outward similitude, the man inside the uniform met with her entire approval.

They crowded around him after the service, to bid him Godspeed; for he was to leave that afternoon. There were the young people to whom, even in his short ministry, he had given a glimpse of the joy of a life of service; the old folk who had loved him as a son; and, most eager of all, the children, who knew that they had had first place in his heart. There were tears in every eye, from old Mrs. Gibbie Gibson and old Watty Sinclair, who wept openly, to Janet who ran home ahead of everyone, overwhelmed with sobbing. She was so blinded with tears, as she fled, that she did not even look at the Sinclair pew; so she did not know that old Watty was there ready to weep with her; nor that Miss Lena did not join the people who thronged around the young soldier, but slipped out of the church alone.

Janet made a desperate effort to regain her self-control before the family returned. To attain this she set furiously to work. Even though it was the Sabbath, and Kirsty might discover her, she felt she must do something; and proceeded to hang Mr. Balfour's picture in her room. He had given it to her the evening he arrived; a photograph taken in his new uniform. She climbed upon a chair and reaching at a perilous angle, managed to hang it on a nail at the foot of her bed. Pepper fussed about, feeling that he was helping.

"There, Peppy, I'll be able to see him first thing in the morning and last thing at night," and then she had a sudden inspiration and leaped from the chair.

Nellie's sister Marjorie had a soldier friend who was going to the war, the same young man who had met his Waterloo in the Doctor's salad. Nellie had confided to Janet that Marjorie hung his picture in her room with a

flag hung above it; and cried about him every night. Janet felt sure she could perform the crying part of the ceremony very easily; but he must have a flag, too. And what more appropriate than the little flag that had been the signal between them for so long! It was in her dresser drawer, where she had put it away when he left. She dared not suggest to Kirsty that she drive a tack on Sunday; so she stuck the flag up with a pin as a concession to the day, promising it a hammer and nail early on Monday morning.

Then, because the pictured face looked down at her with such kind eyes that the tears were very hard to hold back, Janet ran about hunting for another piece of work. She rummaged in her drawer again and took out a little book. It was a pretty autograph album her father had given her on the last Hallowe'en; her twelfth birthday. He had written a little verse on the first page, and her mother had inscribed one on the second. The third page must be Mr. Balfour's. She would lay it on the study desk where he would see it as soon as he returned. When this little task was done, the stamping of snowy feet on the veranda announced the return of the rest of the family from church; and Janet ran down the stairs to meet them, Pepper's joyful antics driving away all appearance of sadness.

She managed to get Mr. Balfour away with her alone for a few minutes before dinner. She took his hand and led him up to the study where they had spent so many happy hours.

"I want you to please write something in my album, a good-bye," she said, handing him the little book; and in spite of her gallant attempt at cheerfulness her voice faltered over the last word.

"What a pretty little book!" he cried, cheerily, "And you've left the place of honour to me—right next to your mother! Ah, isn't it like old times to get into my old place again!"

He sat down before the desk; and yet he did not look familiar to Janet even there. The sight of him in the

strange new uniform, with its shiny buttons and straps made her feel as if he were already far removed.

He looked at Janet thoughtfully, wondering what word he could write in parting that would be helpful to a little girl. She stood beside the desk, her hands locked tightly behind her, her deep, grey eyes telling that the tears were not far away.

"You're growing to be such a big girl, Janet," he said. "Why, you're twelve! I must measure you on the door post before I go; and then when the war's over I'll be right back to see if you've grown any."

But Janet could not rise to his cheeriness.

"Mrs. Caldwell told Miss Lena that maybe you'd have to go right on out to India after the war; and then you wouldn't be back for seven years."

"Twelve and seven make nineteen!" he cried gayly. "Why, you'd be a young lady when I got back! Wouldn't that be fine?"

Janet tried to smile, with but small success; her dimple refused to appear. She shook her short curls despairingly. Seven years! It was as if he had said seventy to the little girl of twelve.

"It's such a long, long time," she said, trying to keep her lip from trembling.

"But I'm sure to be home before that. And think of the lovely songs you'll be singing when I'm away. And, remember, you must learn to knit, because I'll need a great many socks. And you must write me a letter every week; and send me boxes of candy, the way all the girls do for their soldiers."

Janet's eyes were beginning to grow brighter. "Oh, I'd love to do something!" she burst out. "I wish I could be a nurse, and go to war with you."

"The very best thing you can do for your country at present, Jenny Melody, is just to keep on singing, either out loud or in your heart; and be sure you are making melody unto the Lord."

He picked up a pen and looked at Janet again; at her

big honest grey eyes, shadowed to-day with the sorrow of the coming parting; her pretty, short, boyish curls, touching the soft rose of her cheek; her little restless brown hands; it was a very childish picture. What would she be when he saw her again,—if he ever came back? She was so loyal, so crystally truthful, so utterly self-forgotten, so generous of heart. What a perfect woman, nobly planned, she would make some day, provided ambition, the love of pleasure, and all the allurements of the world left her as she was, sweet, and true, and unspoiled. He frowned involuntarily, as he looked into a possible future. He could not forget one whom nature had intended for one of her chief music makers of the earth; one who seemed bright and charming and lovable, but whose heart was callous, and whose thought was all for self. "This old world won't be able to bear its weight of crime if it spoils Janet," he muttered to himself.

He opened the little book at the third page, and after a moment's thought he wrote Kingsley's beautiful "Farewell to a young girl." And below he added the little verse of Scripture that had been her inspiration, "Singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."

He had just signed his name when they were called to dinner, the wonderful meal at which Kirsty had risen to heights never before attained in all her years of triumphant cookery.

As soon as they had finished, Janet's father told her to hand around the Bibles, as she always did after breakfast. It seemed so strange to Janet, to have prayers in the middle of the day.

"We shall read Psalm 91," said the minister. They were strange words; a marvellous promise to one who was going into the midst of battle.

"Thou shalt not be afraid of the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day . . . a thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee . . . For He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways."

The young soldier, to whom they were being read, understood; it was the great eternal promise that his soul would be kept safe, "under the Shadow of the Almighty."

They had just risen from their knees when a loud jingle of bells from the gate announced that the time of separation had come. Dr. Gillespie had promised to drive Captain Balfour to Algonquin, in time for the afternoon train to Toronto. For the War Lords took no note of the Sabbath; and his Battalion was already ordered away.

There was a rush for his cap and his cane and his great coat. The farewells were over in a moment. Mrs. Meldrum's eyes were full of tears, for the mother who was giving up such a son to the battlefield. Mr. Meldrum could only say, "God bless you; God keep you," over and over, as he wrung his hand. Kirsty's manner was unusually severe and forbidding; but there was a look of fierce anguish in her eyes more moving than tears. She had knit him a pair of socks, from the softest wool she could find in the whole neighbourhood; and these she pressed into his hands, saying shortly:

"Here, take these; and mind ye keep a pair o' dry feet on ye!"

Janet ran ahead of him to the gate. She had promised herself over and over that she would not cry; and she was holding desperately to her resolve.

A crowd of children had gathered at the gate to see their hero depart. Spotty Cameron, the Kellys, Nellie and Kitty, and half-a-dozen others. At every gate all up and down the street people were standing waving farewell; and away down near the corner Janet could see Aggie Wright hurrying forward, dressed in a wonderful fur-trimmed coat and red velvet dress, and crying into her new fox fur muff.

Janet was relieved and glad to see Bud and Molly; somehow their presence made the parting a little less bitter. The sorrow was distributed, and its burden did not feel quite so crushing. She stood at the gate in the keen December wind, waving her handkerchief; and Mr. Balfour looked

back and waved Kirsty's new socks, until the cutter disappeared round a curve in the road and he was gone!

The tears would not be held back any longer. Janet fled blindly to the house, and flung herself into her father's arms. She held him tightly around the neck with one arm, while she clung to her mother with the other. She felt that she must hold them fast, lest some dread circumstance snatch them, too, away and leave her entirely desolate.

It was late in the afternoon that she picked up the little album with Mr. Balfour's farewell words, and read them over and over through her tears:

Dear Jenny Melody,

"I'll tell you how to sing a clearer carol
Than lark, who hails the dawn o'er breezy down,
To earn yourself a purer poet's laurel
Than Shakespeare's crown.

"Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever;
Do noble things, not dream them, all day long;
And so make life, death, and that vast forever
One grand sweet song."

Janet was but a child as yet, and was unconscious of their full beauty. But her heart caught and held the simple message "Be good, sweet maid"; and in after years she proved their sublime truth; years that taught the little girl who could not sing to chant the "clearer carol" of a beautiful unselfish life.





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